



THE INDEPENDENT

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56 PAGES OF SPRING STYLE FOR MEN AND WOMEN



Nato sounds war alert as Kosovo talks falter



A C-2 Greyhound being launched from the USS 'Enterprise'. Nato has 430 warplanes, including B-52s with cruise missiles, massed on 48-hour standby

Reuters

HOPES OF A Kosovo peace deal by today's deadline were fading last night as diplomats, aid workers and peace monitors left Yugoslavia, and Slobodan Milosevic refused to meet the chief mediator, the American envoy Christopher Hill.

The prospect of imminent Nato raids against Serbia is looming large. "Nato is ready to take whatever measures are necessary... these include air strikes," the secretary-general, Javier Solana, said.

Mr Hill went to Belgrade for a last-ditch effort to persuade the Yugoslav president to allow Nato peace-keepers into the Serbian province and thus remove the main obstacle to a settlement at the Rambouillet

BY RUPERT CORNWELL

talks by the deadline of 11am GMT. If Mr Milosevic does not relent, strikes against military targets could be launched in days, conceivably hours - a message conveyed in a personal phone call by the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, on Thursday. But Mr Milosevic showed no sign of blinking, telling a Cypriot delegation that Belgrade would not give up Kosovo "even if we are bombed".

While Nato has drawn up plans for raids, planners recognise that conflict with Belgrade would be fraught with danger. Some 430 warplanes, including 260 US aircraft - among them

F-117 Stealth bombers, B-52s and B-2 bombers, are massed, on 48-hour standby, to attack in what Nato calls Operation Noble Anvil. The US is sending six of the B-52 long-range bombers, armed with cruise missiles, to the UK. But it was unclear yesterday how quickly strikes might be launched.

Mr Milosevic has tried to exploit divisions in the Contact Group, and Russia, his traditional friend in the six-nation body, has been voicing ever louder its opposition not only to air strikes, but also the presence of Nato peace-keepers.

As Mr Milosevic spoke, the brinkmanship intensified, with foreign missions in Belgrade withdrawing non-essential

staff. Several Western governments, including Britain, the US and Germany, advised their nationals not to go to Yugoslavia, and to leave if they were already there.

At the same time, dignitaries including Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, co-chairman of the conference, which started on 6 February, were arriving in Rambouillet for its end. But an admission of failure seemed in store rather than the announcement of a deal granting Kosovo wide autonomy and ending a year-long war that has killed 2,000 and driven 300,000 people from their homes.

The best hope last night - but not one diplomats were encouraging - seemed some

"stop-the-clock" formula to allow a day or two's extra time in the search for a breakthrough. "It looks very tough to reach a settlement, but we will be making every effort right down to the wire," Mr Cook said as he left for Paris, where he was to meet his French counterpart and conference co-chairman, Hubert Vedrine, and possibly Mrs Albright.

Closing one possible avenue of compromise, the Russian mediator, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Boris Mayorsky, denied that Russia was trying to win over Mr Milosevic by offering to deploy its own troops in the planned 28,000-strong force.

Complicating matters further, some negotiators for the

ethnic Albanians, who constitute 90 per cent of the population of Kosovo, were criticising a deal they had earlier seemed to accept. Angry at the absence of any reference in the 60-page final draft agreement to a referendum that would lead to independence, they accused the Western mediators of excessively favouring Belgrade.

If the Albanians balk at the deal, punishing Mr Milosevic alone would be much harder for Nato to justify. But air strikes against the guerrilla Kosovo Liberation Army are unfeasible. All the allies could do would be to cut off the supply of arms to the KLA, and warn them that they are on their own against Belgrade.

Chancellor takes stars' debt plea to G7 summit

BY ANDREW GARFIELD
Financial Editor

GORDON BROWN is throwing his weight behind calls this week by rock stars, headed by Bono and David Bowie, and the boxing legend Muhammad Ali to cancel huge amounts of Third World debt.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer will today appeal to his counterparts among the Group of Seven finance ministers to slash the burden of poor countries' debts by \$30bn (£31bn) by the end of the millennium.

At the G7 meeting in Bonn, Mr Brown will table fresh proposals to speed up aid. He wants all the needy countries to be on a systematic programme of debt reduction by 2000. He will also call for a clear link between debt relief and aid to the poor to ensure that cancelled debt repayments are channelled into health, education and economic development, rather than the pockets of self-serving political élites.

Mr Brown said that he would also be renewing his call for the International Monetary Fund to sell some of its gold reserves to finance the debt relief. It has already been proposed that the IMF sell five million ounces but Mr Brown said he believed that should be higher.

Bono, the lead singer of the pop group U2, and Mr Ali were in Britain earlier this week to support Jubilee 2000, a campaign calling for \$371bn of debts owed by the poorest nations to be cancelled by the end of the millennium.

Ann Pettifor, director of Jubilee 2000, said: "The Chancellor is responding directly to Bono and Muhammad Ali and



Bono: Called for debt relief

that's great news. \$30bn to be wiped off the debt mountain of \$371bn is a good start. But there is still a long way to go."

Ian Bray, a spokesman for Oxfam, which is also involved in the campaign, said: "The political train is leaving now. Politically it is important that the Chancellor is putting his head on the block."

He welcomed the Chancellor linking debt relief to where the money is spent. "Debt write-off is not an end in itself. It is kids in schools. Kids that get vaccinated, that is the test."

Mr Brown, speaking yesterday, admitted that the proposals fell short of the demands being made by Mr Ali's campaign. But he insisted that they were "practical measures" which had a real chance of being implemented.

He pointed out that recently Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, and Al Gore, the US Vice-President, have expressed broad support.

Mr Brown and Clare Short, the Overseas Development Minister, wrote this week to the World Bank and the IMF urging them to back his reforms.

Scientists get the pip over GM tomatoes



Zeneca's Sir Nigel Poole leading the way with GM food

IT COULD turn out to be the ultimate GM nightmare for a British biotechnology company, whose employees were pictured on the front of a national newspaper eating genetically modified tomatoes.

The photograph in the *Daily Telegraph* of Dr Nigel Poole and colleagues from Zeneca Plant Science showed the scientists munching their way through whole tomatoes, seeds included. Now the company is to be reported to the Government's health and safety watchdog for possible breach of the regulations governing the escape of GM organisms into the environment.

Officials fear that the seeds of the GM tomatoes could have passed straight through the digestive systems of the Zeneca staff and germinated in a

BY STEVE CONNOR
Science Editor

sewage farm somewhere in deepest Berkshire.

Professor John Beringer, chairman of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, said yesterday that he has no option but to report Zeneca to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which is responsible for prosecutions under the regulations governing the containment of GM plants and animals.

"If they were knowingly eating the tomatoes including the seeds then they are probably bringing about a release to the environment," Professor Beringer said. "My colleagues are uncertain whether it would be examined as a breach of the containment regulations, or

whether it would be deemed a deliberate release. It's probably a breach of containment."

Dr Poole told the newspaper that over the past 10 years about 40 staff at Zeneca have eaten fresh GM tomatoes, which have not been approved for sale in Britain except in a tomato purée where the seeds are destroyed in the process. His wife and two grown-up children have also been willing guinea pigs. "We did it to show confidence in our research," he said.

When asked whether the caption to the photograph was correct in describing the team eating GM tomatoes, Dr Poole said they were in fact ordinary tomatoes because there were no ripe GM versions around at the time. However, he confirmed that he and his colleagues have eaten GM tomatoes and their

seeds for many years, the last time just before Christmas.

A gene in Zeneca's GM tomato has been altered to give it a longer shelf life, allowing it to be picked when it is ripe rather than green.

The research came out of Nottingham University in the Eighties and was developed into a commercial product by ICI Seeds - which later became Zeneca - led by Simon Best, business development manager.

Mr Best was asked in 1989 whether the GM tomatoes tasted nice. He replied that eating them was not allowed: "If people swallowed the tomato seeds the plants could end up growing in a sewage farm somewhere and this would be an unauthorised release of a genetically engineered organism."

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IN TOMORROW'S INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

'I was soundly, nakedly, publicly dressed down by a knock-jawed, dark, wrecked beauty of a termagant, who spat invective at me through a mouthful of teeth gone akimbo'

Will Self meets Tracey Emin

THE BEST-WRITTEN SUNDAY PAPER IN BRITAIN, FEATURING AN WILSON, ALAIN DE BOTTON, SIMON SINGH, DAVID THOMSON, JEREMY CLARKE, PETER YORK, JOAN SMITH, GILBERT ADAIR, MICHAEL BYWATER, JOHN MORTIMER AND WALLACE ARNOLD

'Sue us' Lawrence suspects are told

THE FIVE men accused of the racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence were yesterday challenged to back their protestations of innocence in court.

The *Daily Mail* invited the "Lawrence Five" to sue it for libel after the suspects' mothers took part in a radio interview and claimed their sons were not racist or violent and had been victimised by the media.

The mothers of David Norris, the brothers Neil and Jamie Acourt, Gary Dobson and Luke Knight also maintained they wanted to sue the *Daily Mail*, which had branded the five "murderers". They claimed they were only prevented from doing so because of lack of funds.

In response the newspaper stated it would "welcome the opportunity to establish the truth in a court of law about this terrible crime".

The interview with Pam Knight, Patricia Acourt, Pauline Dobson and Theresa Norris on the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme with presenter John Humphrys came days before Sir William Macpherson publishes his report on the murder. Under questioning the women claimed that the "persecution" of their sons was "political". One added: "Our sons aren't racist. We take people as we find them." When Mr Humphrys pointed out that the five had been secretly filmed by the police "using the most appalling racist language and behaving in the most appalling racist way", one of the women explained it away as "bravado".

Mr Humphrys asked Mrs Acourt about footage which showed Neil Acourt "wielding

BY KIM SENGUPTA,
PAUL MCCANN
AND ANDREW BUNCOMBE

a knife, showing somebody how to stab a black man... if it didn't suggest violence, it's hard to imagine what might."

She responded: "I don't think it suggested violence at all... it was play acting."

The women refused to say where their sons were on the night of Stephen's death "because of legal reasons". And they claimed the men had not sued for libel because they had been advised by lawyers it would cost "at least £500,000".

Asked what they would say to any lawyer prepared to assist with a libel action, one said: "Please get in touch."

In the past, however, the "Lawrence Five" have done their utmost not to answer questions about the murder - both at the inquest and the inquiry.

The BBC defended the interview saying the programme wanted to hear all sides. Humphrys said it had been a difficult one to get right. "I wanted them to talk and if you get a sense... that by shouting and screaming and banging the table they are not going to talk then you'd be mad to conduct the interview that way." Duwayne Brooks, the man with Stephen when he died, yesterday criticised the portrayal of black people in a drama-documentary on the crime. "Steve and I were made to look like ruffians, with the sort of street talk that we didn't use. How can we get rid of stereotyping if people like these film-makers haven't learnt by now the damage it can do?" he said in a statement.



Dancers in Bradford at yesterday's launch of a month-long festival to celebrate 150 years of the culture of one of the city's main ethnic groups - the Irish. Their mass arrival to escape famine means that at least 60,000 Bradfordians can claim Irish ancestry

Garden fertiliser 'waste of money'

BY PHILIP POPE

GARDEN FERTILISERS are a waste of money, according to a study released yesterday.

Gardening Which? magazine tested six gardens over a period of three years and concluded that those left alone did just as well as those fed with artificial fertilisers or organic manure.

The report concluded: "Sadly for the fertiliser industry, our trials have shown that, in the majority of cases, it's not worth bothering to feed your gardens at all."

Each garden tested included a lawn, bulbs, perennial plants, climbers, shrubs, strawberries, vegetables, a rose and a dwarf tree.

Only four of the gardens were fed, two with liquid and Growmore fertilisers and the other two with manure and liquid comfrey plant.

After three years the *Which?* gardeners found no significant differences between the gardens.

A spokeswoman said: "Plants in the fed gardens did grow slightly lusher and lawns needed cutting more often but there were no real advantages in adding extra nutrients to the soil."

Additional trials involving more than 25,000 plants and 22 different fertilisers yielded the same results.

Alistair Ayres, the editor of *Gardening Which?*, said: "Feeding is only worthwhile for a few greedy crops like cabbages and for plants in containers but in the majority of cases it is not worth bothering to feed gardens at all."

But John Cushman, a frequent panelist on the BBC's *Gardeners' Question Time*, said: "I do agree that fertiliser is possibly overrated and that too much of it is used."

"But the report said that plants in the fed gardens were lusher and a lovely velvety green lawn is what most gardeners strive for."

Blairites handed quango jobs

THE GOVERNMENT is packing new quangos with Labour supporters in a "jobs for the boys" strategy, similar to the Tory practice which the party criticised when in Opposition.

More than third of the 103 members of the new Regional Development Agencies have direct links to the Labour party. In a letter seen by *The Independent*, Sir Jeremy Beecham, Labour chairman of the Local Government Association, has complained of "problems of political balance" to the Minister for the Regions, Richard Cabora.

In 1995, Tony Blair told Labour's annual conference:

BY ANDREW MULLINS
AND PAUL WAUGH

"It's time to sweep away the quango state." In the same year he pledged to stop "everything being run by unaccountable Tory placemen".

Gillian Shepherd, Tory spokesman on the regions, said last night: "This is Labour's gerrymandering of the whole system to ensure only their voice is heard. It is a denial of democracy and the peach of hypocrisy on Labour's part."

The eight RDAs across England have 103 members, of which 35 are Labour councillors, union officials, and people

who work for Labour-supporting organisations. Two others are Labour lords. This 37 contrasts with the seven Conservatives and eight Liberal Democrats appointed. A further 13 are connected to the Government by other ministerial appointments, many of which are paid roles.

RDAs were established by John Prescott's Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions last December. Each of the agencies has a chairman paid £44,000 a year for two days work a week and a board of up to 13 members paid a salary of £7,000 for two days a month.

The RDAs aim to help regional development by raising people's skills and regenerating the social and physical environment. The agencies are funded by £1.1bn of public money. A possible further £1bn raised from business is being allocated to attract inward investment, notably from the European Union.

Among the RDA chairmen is Lord Thomas of Macclesfield, ennobled by Labour last year. He runs the North West RDA and is paid £425 for each of his two days a week. Lord Haslam, chairman of Northern Foods and a substantial party donor, receives £290 per meeting as an

RDA board member. Kevin Curran, who sits on the North East's RDA, is northern regional secretary of the GMB union. Other union officials are Christine Wood, regional secretary of TUC Midlands region, and James Hunt, chairman of the Midlands TUC and regional secretary of the TGWU. Richard Leese, of Manchester city council, is one of the 10 Labour leaders on RDAs. The ministry said last night that independent assessors took part in shortlisting and interviews. All appointments had been made in accordance with guidelines from the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

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Belfast	5.41pm	7.38am
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Bristol	5.41pm	7.38am
Glasgow	5.41pm	7.38am
London	5.41pm	7.38am
Manchester	5.41pm	7.38am
Newcastle	5.41pm	7.38am

Location	AM	HT	PM	HT
Aberdeen	9.57	13.6	10.14	13.2
Cardiff	8.17	4.5	8.36	4.3
Doncaster	8.21	3.6	8.43	3.3
Edinburgh	1.27	6.8	1.48	6.6
Exeter	1.56	4.0	2.11	4.2
Gloucester	7.52	2.4	8.14	2.1
Greenwich	3.11	3.4	3.24	3.6
Harwich	2.19	4.1	2.47	4.0
Hull	12.45	8.5	1.03	8.3
Leeds	1.39	9.4	2.00	9.7
Liverpool	9.00	6.9	9.09	7.3
London	5.16	5.5	5.30	5.6
Manchester	1.39	9.4	2.00	9.7
Midland	8.57	7.1	9.17	6.8
Newcastle	7.50	7.1	8.11	6.8
Portsmouth	9.54	2.1	10.12	1.9
Reading	1.54	4.7	2.06	4.7
Sheffield	10.49	5.1	11.10	4.8
Southampton	6.48	5.8	6.58	5.9
Wick	1.54	3.5	2.03	3.7

FORECAST
General situation: Overcast with sun in the south-east to leave much of southern England dry with sunny spells, although it will be colder than recently. The Midlands and East Angles will also have sunny spells, but showers will break out later. Wales, northern England and Northern Ireland will be breezy with sun and showers, the showers merging into longer spells of rain later. Scotland will have heavy showers, most frequent in the west and turning to snow on the hills. London, SE & East of England: Rain clearing to leave it mostly dry with sunny spells, but colder than yesterday with an increasing risk of showers. A moderate west to north-westerly wind. Max temp 8-10C (45-50F).
E Anglia, Midlands: Some early sunshine, but one or two showers later. A moderate westerly wind. Max temp 7-9C (45-48F).
Channel 5, SW England, Wales: Some sunny spells, but breezy with showers this afternoon. A moderate west to north-westerly wind. Max temp 7-9C (45-48F).
West 4, NW & E England, Lake District, Isle of Man: Breezy with sunny spells and showers, the showers becoming more prolonged this afternoon. A fresh westerly wind. Max temp 7-9C (45-48F).
NW & SE Scotland, Edinburgh, Aberdeen: Cold and windy. Some sunny spells for sheltered spots, but showers elsewhere will be increasingly wintry. A strong westerly wind. Max temp 5-7C (41-45F).
NW & SW Scotland, Glasgow, W Isles, N Isles: Occasional early sun spell but cold and blustery with showers turning increasingly wintry. A strong to gale force westerly wind. Max temp 6-7C (43-45F).
N Ireland: Some sunshine, but breezy with showers becoming more frequent and prolonged later in the afternoon. A fresh westerly wind. Max temp 6-9C (43-48F).

OUTLOOK
Most areas will be at risk from showers on Sunday accompanied by a brisk and cold wind, the showers falling as snow in Scotland. Shattered eastern parts should see some sunshine. The north-west wind will increase on Monday, bringing heavy wintry showers further south.

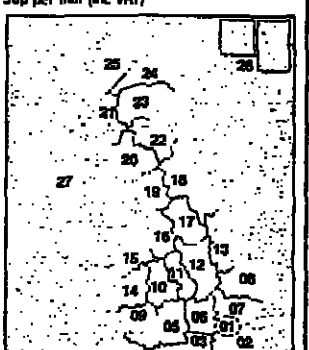
TRAVEL
South Yorkshire: M1 Between J34 Tinsley Viaduct (A6109) & J34 Tinsley Viaduct (A6109). Sheffield: Carriageway reduced to 2 lanes southbound. Unit 21st November 2000. Gloucestershire: A40 Lansdown Rd, Cheltenham. Closed due to roadworks. Inbound. Diversion in place. Unit 1st June. Bristol: A14 Pelton Dock, Roadworks. Unit 20th February. AA Roadwatch: Call 0336 401777 for the latest local and national traffic news. Source: The Automobile Association. Calls charged at 50p per min (inc VAT).

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Exeter	1.56	4.0	2.11	4.2
Gloucester	7.52	2.4	8.14	2.1
Greenwich	3.11	3.4	3.24	3.6
Harwich	2.19	4.1	2.47	4.0
Hull	12.45	8.5	1.03	8.3
Leeds	1.39	9.4	2.00	9.7
Liverpool	9.00	6.9	9.09	7.3
London	5.16	5.5	5.30	5.6
Manchester	1.39	9.4	2.00	9.7
Midland	8.57	7.1	9.17	6.8
Newcastle	7.50	7.1	8.11	6.8
Portsmouth	9.54	2.1	10.12	1.9
Reading	1.54	4.7	2.06	4.7
Sheffield	10.49	5.1	11.10	4.8
Southampton	6.48	5.8	6.58	5.9
Wick	1.54	3.5	2.03	3.7

Southport	-	1.5	8	46
Stornoway	0.5	4.7	11	52
Swanage	1.0	0.3	12	54
Tenby	0.9	0.3	10	50
Torquay	0.4	0	13	55
Weymouth	0.2	0.3	10	50

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RAIN OR
SHINE...



Robin Page and his lurcher, Bramble: 'I am very upset at the way the rural culture has been sidelined. It's almost urban colonialism'

Tom Pilstan

One man, his dog, and a crusade against the mandarins of the BBC

ROBIN PAGE meets me at the door of his farm cottage in the village of Barton, in Cambridgeshire, and explodes. "This is the first minute of peace I've had this week." As if on queue, the phone rings. It's Sky Television. He apologises but the phone rings again anyway.

The frenzy began earlier this week after Mr Page launched his campaign to save the BBC sheepdog programme, *One Man and His Dog*. He has presented the programme for five years.

"Even German television want an interview," he says. "You know, *One Man and His Dog*." One of the many phone calls during the interview was to tell Mr Page that the cam-

BY ANN TRENNEMAN

paign has now attracted 2,483 letters. "Holy Camels!" he says. Outrage is an overused word but it is absolutely the right one to describe how Mr Page feels about the BBC. He says that cancelling the programme is a slur against the country, rural England, a way of life.

"There is an immense prejudice against country people. If you've got a rural accent, people think you are thick. People think we are semi-literate."

Sky is interested in getting the programme, though no deal has been done. This news made the front page of *The Sun* yesterday. "Now this was a lifelong ambition," he says, pointing to

the story and a small picture of himself on the front. "I'm just extremely sorry that you can't see my nipples." He would prefer the programme to stay on the BBC though he is hardly diplomatic. "You know I'm a bit worried that the BBC management may be genetically modified," he says. What does he mean? "They have such an elitist view of the world."

Mr Page is a 55-year-old bundle of energy and incredibly amiable. He may be angry but he is also jolly and so manages to be friendly about it. He is so busy that he is having trouble finding time to get married. "I've been engaged for two years," he says. He is a farmer, a writer, a broadcaster and the

founder of an environmental farming organisation called the Countryside Restoration Trust. But when I ask him how he would describe himself he says: "An English peasant." He is serious about this and says Wat Tyler, the leader of the Peasants' Revolt, is a hero.

But what does it mean? "It means that I consider myself very ordinary. My boots and my heart are in the country. I am very upset at the way the rural culture has been sidelined. It's almost urban colonialism."

He stood as a Referendum Party candidate as a move against the Common Agricultural Policy and says that he is now disenfranchised.

The Tories were awful, he

says, and New Labour is in the same trough. He has asked six ministers down to see the work that is being done by the Restoration Trust. Two turned him down and four never bothered to reply. "The countryside is in crisis," he says. "There are so many issues - genetically modified food, the closure of abattoirs, the fall in prices." He says farming is in its worst crisis for 70 years.

At this point, a bundle of hair walks shakily into the study. This is Bramble, a 16-year-old lurcher with confusingly long locks. Mr Page confirms that Bramble has some terrier in her too. "The idea was to create a dog that looks like a miniature deerhound," he says.

He had four collie sheepdogs but three were killed on the roads and the loss of the last one was too heart-breaking to get another.

He was born next door (his sister lives there now). "So I've only travelled 10 feet in my life," he says. His grandfather left school at 13 to become a shepherd boy and went on to train as a butcher. In the end he owned four shops and bought the 113-acre farm in 1925. Mr Page has beef cattle, hens, cereal crops and 23 sheep "because I like them".

Other obsessions include cricket, wildlife and Africa. His conversation is wildly unpredictable. At one point he was talking of going to Australia for

the cricket when he says that he met a lesbian separatist there who has started a wildlife refuge for female animals only. No males allowed. "So if you're a poor little male fruit bat and you fall out of tree into that refuge, you're in big trouble."

But then he is serious again as he gathers up Bramble and his shepherd's crook for the photograph. "Yes I am a happy person but I am also desperately sad at the same time about what is happening to what I regard as my people - if that doesn't sound too much like Billy Graham." Then the phone rang and a television crew arrived. It's been a bizarre day, said Mr Page. Not, I suspect, the last one.

Never forget: an ass is a donkey

BY STEVE BOGGAN

IF YOUR name is Fanny, change it. If your name is Randolph, don't shorten it. And for goodness sake, always remember that an ass is a donkey.

This is the latest advice to American executives whose career paths lead across the pond to Britain, a country with cold weather and warm beer where cowboys are "dodgy builders" and Indians "wear turbans, not feathers".

It caused amusement this week at the American oil company Amoco when, in the form of a 50-point checklist entitled "Things you need to know about working for a British company", it was passed among staff.

"Power lunches and working breakfasts will be replaced by elevenses and tea-breaks", it warns, adding, "Offices will be 12ft x 6ft for executives, 8ft x 5ft for senior managers. Everyone else will be shoehorned into a small open-plan space. It will not be air-conditioned."

Taking a swipe at the Great British workplace - in a manner that could have been written by a Brit - the list warns: "The company jet will be replaced by the company bike. Company



No 46: Nobody likes Fergie

cars will be similar in size to a shoebox and will have an engine with the power output of a hairdryer. Food portions in the company canteen will be large enough to feed a small pygmy. The restaurant will serve spotted dick at least twice a week."

Bemused executives are told: "Giggling uncontrollably at toilet humour and words like 'bottom' is normal behaviour. And even when talking about dancing, seabirds, tobacco or hairdos, never use the word 'shag'."

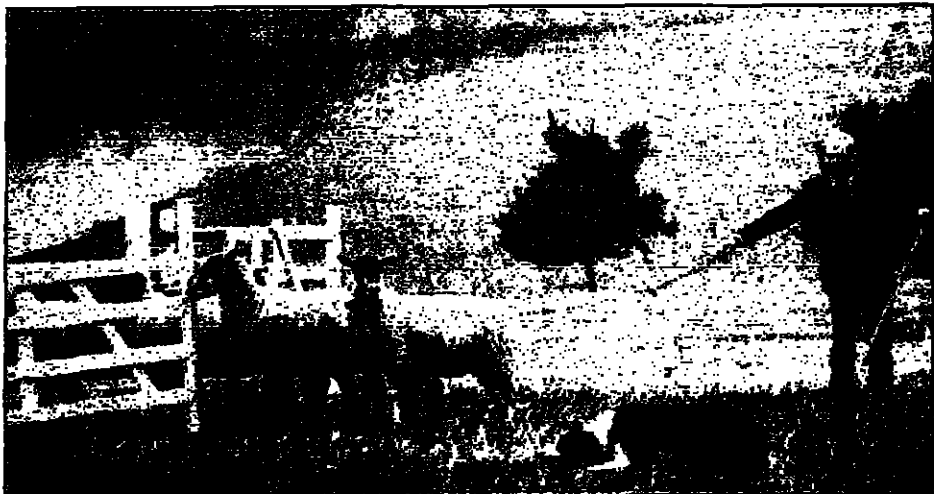
There is the usual complaint that "cold drinks will be served with a maximum of two ice-cubes, which will not be renewable. Cold drinks will not be renewable either."

Most complaints will ring true to the British worker - "The company's social club's sports activities will be cricket, darts and football hooliganism."

Three other pieces of advice, however, may not. Point number 46 states: "Nobody likes Fergie. At all." No 47: "Nobody ever did." No 48: "Or ever will."

Latching on to a typical pre-occupation with un-PC office practices, the advice adds: "The company newspaper will have a photo of a semi-naked woman on page three and lots of juicy articles about who [sic] the receptionist is bonking."

Abandon this asset? You would have to be barking



'One Man and his Dog': The BBC have got rid of a precious gem

SO, FARMER Birt and his loyal shepherds Ventob and Salmon have pursued their lips and blown time, after 23 glorious years, of *One Man And His Dog*.

You'd think they would have built up the spectacle of sheepdog trialling so that when critics made remarks to the effect that the BBC no longer seems committed to sport - having lost the FA Cup Final and Test cricket, not to mention the unsociable scheduling of *Match of the Day* - they would have been able to say, "Ah, but we still have *One Man And His Dog*."

While *ITV's* *Gladiators* made heroes of Jet, Hunter and Saracen, who were tough, nimble and quick-thinking, BBC's



BRIAN VINER

One Man And His Dog also made heroes of Jet, Hunter and Saracen. And they were more than tough, nimble and quick-thinking. They had really bad breath, too.

In 1994, Robin Page filled the capacious wellies of the leg-

endary presenter Phil Drabble, and had that slightly in-bred look which suited the programme perfectly. It makes my heart sing to know that Page now plans to take sheepdog trialling to Sky, where it deserves to become a bulwark of pay-per-view TV alongside championship boxing.

Latterly, Page had a wonderful foil in the commentator Gus Dermody, who bore comparison with the likes of John Morrison and Bill McLaren.

In fact, he was arguably an even finer commentator for it is a relatively simple matter to excite viewers when a great goal or try is scored, but it takes some doing to get pulses racing with "And all seven sheep are safe-

ly off the trailer and down towards the shedding ring."

Dermody considered it very non-ewe to get too frenzied. He delivered his commentary flatly, without the shrieking hyperbole of a Murray Walker, in fact without the shrieking hyperbole of a speaking clock.

"And Sid's away to the right, Sid's going quite square, Sid's working them well." I recall him saying one week of the eventual winning dog.

Every word carried the conviction that sheepdog trialling is the noblest and most thrilling pursuit known to man. And he may have been right. In which case, BBC executives have got rid of one of their greatest assets. They must be barking.

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Sainsbury used China trip to promote biotechnology

LORD SAINSBURY of Thurville promoted biotechnology on an official visit to China and South Korea less than two months after he joined the Government, it was revealed last night. The Trade and Industry minister, who has substantial interests in biotechnology companies and who has denied taking part in official discussions of GM food policy, immediately came under fresh pressure to resign.

By FRANK ABRAMS
Westminster Correspondent
Research Council (BBSRC) and its counterpart in Korea. The research council is organising a follow-up trip which will receive sponsorship from the Foreign Office.

Lord Sainsbury has been a long-term enthusiast for the genetic modification of plants, and has funded research on the subject, as well as owning companies which hope to exploit the technology commercially. His charity, the Gatsby Foundation, funds the transfer of biotechnology to developing countries, along with the BBSRC and other bodies.

The chief executive of the BBSRC, Rob Baker, accompanied the minister to the Far East and described the trip in the council's newsletter. "The ministerial discussions were an important milestone in UK links with Korea... During the visit I signed an agreement with the Korean Institute for Bioscience and Biotechnology to encourage collaborative links. Biotechnology was an important feature of the ministerial meeting," he wrote.

Both Friends of the Earth and the Conservative trade and industry spokesman, John Redwood, who have formed an unusual alliance on the issue, condemned Lord Sainsbury's involvement in the trip. Charles Secrett, executive director of Friends of the Earth, said full details of the trip should be revealed. "In particular we need to know whether and when GM food and crops were discussed. Did Lord Sainsbury run out of the door whenever the subject came up? The visit may be yet further evidence of an apparent conflict of interest. Lord Sainsbury may be the right man, but he is certainly in the wrong job," he said. Mr Secrett has written to Tony Blair asking for more details of the visit.

Mr Redwood said the minister was in "a ridiculously embarrassing position." "I remember being told that Lord Sainsbury took no part in discussions on GM food. Now we see that he went, at the taxpayers' expense, to China to promote and discuss biotechnology. How could he have avoided discussing GM food on such a trip?" he asked. A spokesman for the Department of Trade and Industry said there was no conflict of interest. The trip was to promote all types of science. "When it comes to making policy decisions which have a bearing on his interests that is when he feels the need to stand aside."

Farmer SOWS seeds of change

By CHARLES ARTHUR
Technology Editor

ROBERT APPEL has one principal worry about being the first person to grow soya beans commercially in Britain. "We're terrified that some load of eco-protesters are going to drive along the road, see these plants and think they're a load of these Frankenstein things," he said. "So we're thinking of labelling them to point out that this is not genetically modified. It's just soya. And it's the first time anyone has grown it in this country."



Robert Appel prepares to sow the seeds of a revolution with the first soya crop to be planted in Britain

Russell Sach

"Now a team in Finland has managed to produce a strain which will grow above 52 degrees north and below 52 south of the Equator," explained Mr Appel. "We have been testing it in New Zealand, and in spring we will start sowing it here."

He is keen to emphasise that no genetic engineering was involved in producing the new strain. "We have talked to a number of food manufacturers and chicken and turkey producers. And the fact is that the first of those white meat producers who can go and say that their animals are fed on non-GM soya is going to get a ton of business."

Certainly, any food processor or manufacturer trying to guarantee that soya bought from the US will not contain DNA from Monsanto's GM "Roundup Ready" soya, which is resistant to its Roundup herbicide, faces a tough task. Earlier this week, Linda McCartney sausages and Iceland products have been shown to contain at least traces of the Monsanto DNA. "I would doubt anyone's claims to have sourced non-GM soya from the US," said Mr Appel.

But can he be sure that British-grown soya will compete on price with the enormous American producers, who farm thousands of hectares and ship in bulk? "Oh yes, absolutely," he said. "It will get a subsidy from Brussels. It falls under the same category as oilseed rape."

Rest of world eats up without a fuss

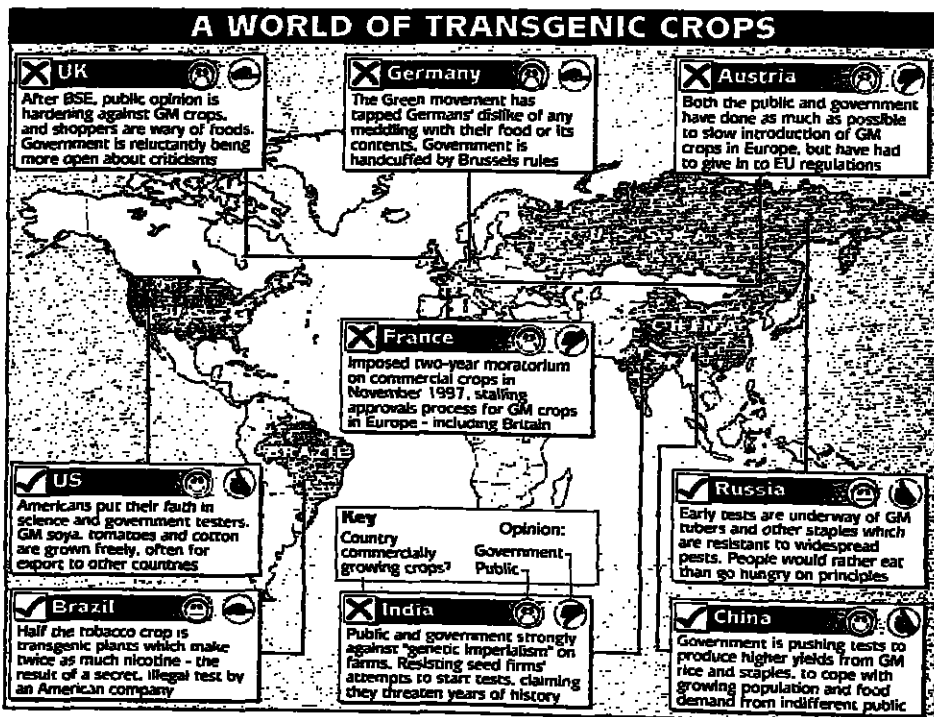
THE BRITISH debate about genetically modified (GM) crops and food is echoed around much of Europe, as is the wary attitude towards them. But further afield, and especially in crucial countries such as the United States, Russia, and China, the planting of transgenic crops is going ahead almost without raising any interest among the public.

By CHARLES ARTHUR AND MARY DEJEVSKY
have been grown in Russia to try to withstand unfavourable elements and parasites. Speaking last year at the World Farming Congress in May, Graham Blight of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, said: "People must realise that these GM [plants] are going to be part and parcel of agriculture production. There's something like \$18bn (£11.25 bn) worth of crops grown in the world from genetically engineered products."

But there is strong opposition. India is fighting to try to prevent companies like Monsanto from selling GM seeds to its farmers without careful regulation. Its fear is both that the ancient forms of agriculture will be destroyed by modern practices, and that onerous contracts will reduce their farmers to penury.

Within Europe, Austria has repeatedly attempted to stymie the European Commission's attempts to license GM crops by exploiting the labyrinthine approvals process, under which novel crops and foods have to be shown to have no harmful effects and to have benefits over those they might replace.

"Austria was the first country to react strongly back in 1995 or 1996," said Doug Parr, a campaigner for Greenpeace. "It culminated in a 'peoples' vote'... in 1997, which came out against GM crops." But Austria's attempts at opposition have been steamrollered by Brussels, which has the legal process on its side. In Germany, opinion



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Student revolt against the NU

Infant pupils may be set 60 objectives

Acid leaks on to protected marshland

ANTI-POLLUTION TEAMS from the Environment Agency and English Nature were striving last night to contain a major leak of industrial acid onto a protected marshland which is a haven for wild birds.

A large amount of hydrochloric acid was discharged onto Greenabella marsh on Teesside from a factory belonging to Tioxide, an ICI subsidiary, which makes titanium dioxide, an ingredient of cosmetics. The marsh is part of the Tees and Hartlepool Foreshore and Wetlands Site of Special Scientific Interest, a network of pools, marsh and mudflats in the Tees estuary, a major wintering place for wading birds.

Greenabella marsh is an important haven for birds such as the curlew, redshank, teal and shelduck. It was feared the local invertebrate life, the shrimps, molluscs and worms on which the birds feed, could become contaminated with the

BY MICHAEL MCCARTHY
Environment Correspondent

acid and put the birds themselves at severe risk.

The acid is believed to have leaked into a stormwater drain and so out onto the marshland, which Tioxide owns.

The company itself discovered the leak and alerted the Environment Agency, whose officers spent yesterday supervising the pumping of seawater onto the marsh, which by last night was successfully diluting the spill.

The work will go on over the weekend until the water acidity level returns to normal.

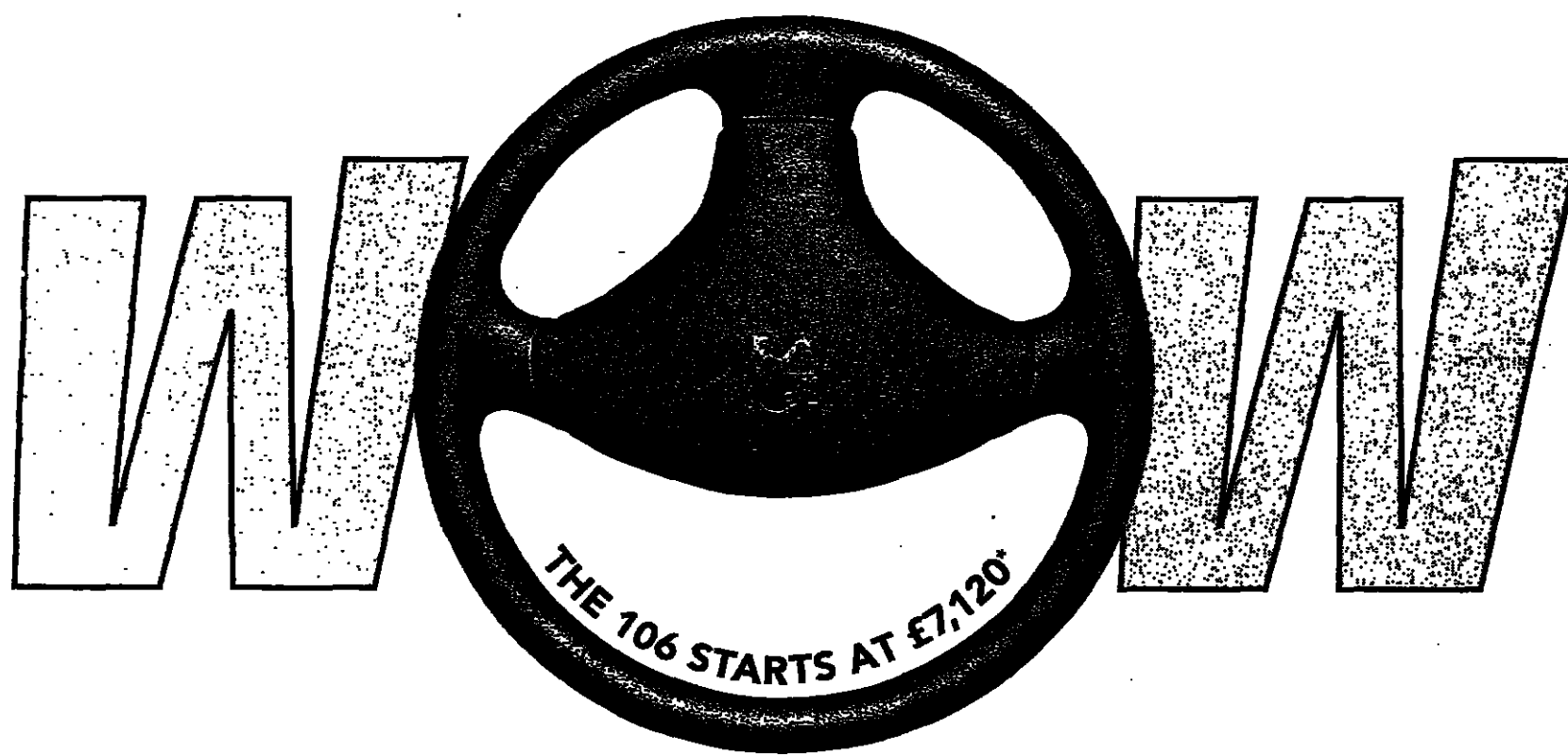
Steve Hardy of the Environment Agency said it was one of the worst incidents he had attended. "The water was as acidic as you can get," he said.

Yesterday afternoon the first signs of dead invertebrates were seen but no dead birds had been found.



In the shadow of the Tioxide chemical works on Teesside, an ecologist examines the damage done to marshland by a spill of hydrochloric acid

Carl Rutherford



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Police to scrap 999 call targets

A POLICE force is to abolish set time targets for responding to emergency 999 calls after its chief constable condemned them as "misleading and dangerous".

The targets will be dropped in Sussex from April after it was revealed that there were almost two crashes involving police cars every day, with a significant number taking place during emergency call-outs.

Paul Whitehouse, the Chief Constable of Sussex, said that the targets, which are monitored by the Audit Commission - which considers them a key factor in making forces more accountable - put the public and officers at risk.

He argued that some officers were taking unnecessary risks just to beat the target times. In Sussex, they are supposed to arrive at 90 per cent of incidents requiring "emergency response" within 10 minutes if they take place in Brighton, Hove, Eastbourne, Hastings and Worthing, and within 20 minutes elsewhere. The police, exceeded their target last year by responding in time in 91 per cent of the cases.

In the 12 months to March 1998, there were 873 accidents involving police cars, which included damage to vehicles being chased. In almost 80 per cent of them - 701 - police vehicles were damaged. Three people died, 13 were seriously injured and another 36 hurt in the accidents.

Mr Whitehouse said: "What gets measured gets done and if you measure the speed, officers will get there with speed. They will see that as more important than anything else. They may then take their eye

BY JASON BENNETTO
Crime Correspondent

off the ball. The pressure on officers to drive fast can lead to them making errors. We think it's more important to deliver a quality service.

"It's better to respond to an emergency call in 11 minutes and do it properly than try and get there inside 10 minutes and not do it properly. I'm in favour of performance indicators, it is the targets we are taking away."

He added: "We shall continue to get to those calls which require our immediate attendance as fast as possible."

Sussex Police Authority has agreed to a request by the force to withdraw the targets from 1 April. In future, the force intends simply to publish their performances without a target. There will also be surveys of emergency callers who will be asked how satisfied they were with the service.

Government figures estimate that the full cost to taxpayers of each road death is £1,042,000 including the time of police, hospitals and coroners, loss of earnings and legal fees.

The emergency response times were one of the original police "performance indicators" established five years ago. The Audit Commission has called for national standard targets for emergency responses, which it believes are an important part of police scrutiny. It has criticised some forces for setting targets that are easy to reach. For example, in Humberstone they have only to attend to 85 per cent of calls made in urban areas within 15 minutes.

IN BRIEF

Lawsuit over RAC windfall fails

A LEGAL action launched by disaffected overseas members of the RAC who were excluded from windfall payouts from the proposed sale of the roadside rescue service was dismissed yesterday by the High Court. The existence of the lawsuit was effectively blocking the sale.

Suit against Lord Irvine 'political'

THE LORD Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, yesterday dismissed a race and sex discrimination case brought against him as "mischievous and political" and said he would not attend the hearing to defend himself. The action is being brought by two solicitors.

Nestle ice-cream nut warning

NESTLE ISSUED a warning on one of its ice-cream deserts after finding it had been contaminated with hazelnuts. It was told by a woman who had an allergic reaction to Lyons Maid New Cascade Toffee Ice Cream Desert. She did not go to hospital and made a full recovery.

DNA test on feet identifies woman

NEW DNA tests have positively proved the identity of a woman whose feet were the only body parts found after her sea suicide. Tests proved a genetic link with the feet of Claudine Payne, 29, and her mother.

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The biggest urban legend of them all

THIS IS A London-centric observation, but the longer you live in and do not leave the capital the easier it is to forget how much the rest of Britain has changed.

In London, you behave in old-fashioned ways. You take the bus (is there any other place in Britain where the middle class still do this in substantial numbers?) or the Tube, you visit department stores with lifts, and single-screen cinemas are still located on main streets.

What Londoners call "the country", which in the London imagination includes country towns and indeed whole cities, is no longer like that. Great straight roads filled with cars push through it. Multiplexes and shopping parks stand apparently randomly in the middle of nowhere, but actually near a roundabout or intersection. The traffic seems just as heavy as it was an hour ago on the Westway - heavier maybe.

Obviously nothing can be done here, not even the purchase of a pint of milk, without the door first getting into a car. You're entering Sussex but it could be New Jersey. And in this American analogy London also fits. Its way of living is coming to be as separate from the rest of the country as New York's is from the rest of the United States.

Or so I think, driving south through the rain on Sunday for a long half-term weekend at a friend's cottage in this place, "the country". We've driven for ninety minutes from home in north London and have still to meet it. We follow the A3 to the A24 and then the A24. Then I see a sign to the village of Mickleham, just below Box Hill, and remember that this was where my great-aunt lived and where she is buried.

I have been here only twice before, the last time 23 years ago for her funeral. There was some later controversy, I remember, about the inscription on her tombstone: "There shall be no more light". Surely that couldn't be right, in a Christian graveyard? And so we turn off to the village to take a look.

Sure enough, one letter in the inscription has been re-chiselled and re-lettered: an "r" has replaced an "l".

"There shall be no more night": a more optimistic view of the afterlife than that caused by a stonemason's mistake. I'm glad for my Great-Aunt Nellie's sake, and walking back towards the car I remember how I came to this place as a five-year-old.

She was then (so dates on the gravestone tell me) newly widowed. Her husband had served in the army of British India. She lived in a cosy gate-keeper's cottage on what was then the main Dorking road and we were dropped at her front door by Green Line bus. There can't have been much other

NOTEBOOK



IAN JACK

traffic on the road at that time, because in the afternoon my father took me for a walk down it. I remember drizzle and huge snails on the verges, and my father explaining that perhaps the chalk in the soil did that: the calcium made their shells grow big.

Other than that, I remember various shades of green: the green of the Green Line bus, the green of the meadows and the trees in the valley, the sudden sight of a green Southern train across the meadows sliding towards Dorking or London with a faint electric sizzle which disturbed the quiet.

Now the valley contains a dual carriageway as well as a railway line, and Dorking is a suburb with suburbs - which have almost reached my great-aunt's old home. When we drove past it on Sunday, I noticed that its neighbour was a large car park.

These facts and memories are commonplace. England has nourished illusions about the countryside and regretted its damage since Ruskin. Writers such as Orwell and Laurie Lee have made whole meals of it. But never before have I felt the force of a remark made by a friend of mine, the writer Tony Gould, a month or so ago. Tony comes from a farming family in Devon and we were having a fairly standard London conversation about the benefits (better schools, cheaper houses) of moving to "the country".

The worst thing about living there, he said, was how you were forced to notice change. Fields minus hedges, moors minus sheep, closed shops, drunk or drugged kids, and bloody awful traffic jams around the nearest supermarket.

London has also changed, but in less depressing ways and in any case change is part of its nature. On Tuesday night, after driving against a long line of headlights stuck motionless across the South Downs, I was glad to be back inside its fierce and illusion-less grip.

IN THE second section of today's *Independent* there will be, as usual, a handy guide to how critics in general (not just this newspaper's own) have received new plays, films, books, CDs and so on. The critical consensus is marked symbolically by a small silhouette

of a woman in states varying between ecstasy and torpor.

Sometimes she stands from her chair and applauds (bravo, excellent!); sometimes she sits forward on her chair and applauds (good, enjoyable); sometimes she sits back on her chair and doesn't applaud (mildly to poor); sometimes she's slumped almost flat on her chair and probably asleep (dire, wake me after the credits).

That might seem an adequate scale of response, but I don't think so. The poor woman, this victim of so much botched and painful enterprise in the name of art or entertainment, doesn't get mad enough. There needs to be two more categories, one for the stuff that makes you angry (woman throwing her chair, perhaps) and one for the stuff that makes you want to leave or switch off (an empty chair).

What has brought this on? On Wednesday I went to see *Life is Beautiful*, the Italian film which has been nominated for seven Oscars, under the impression that it was brave, inventive, moving and (not least) funny.

The Italian comic actor Roberto Benigni wrote and directed the film and stars in it as an Italian Jew, who, when seized and deported to Hitler's death camps, sustains his small son's innocence and will to live by pretending, comically, that the procedures of the Holocaust are a childish game.

That's the "brave" part: the juxtaposition of the two words "comic" and "Holocaust" in any description of the film. But the film itself is not brave at all.

Forget the Holocaust, the terrible non-fiction monster on whose back *Life is Beautiful* has fictionally, cheekily and sentimentally ridden its claims to fame, and you're left with the plot and characterisation (save excellent performances by our hero's son and uncle) of a Norman Wisdom film: *Trouble at Trebinka* almost.

The film is technically incompetent, structurally weak, directorially unimaginative. It sounds as though it was recorded in an empty church hall. The death camp looks like an abandoned textile factory set in some lovely Italian countryside, which is quite probably what it is.

As for the ever-present Benigni himself, he gets down on his knees from the first minute and begs the audience to love him. Even Chaplin did not push his endearment so far and, naturally, it has the opposite effect. By all means save him from the train to Poland in the fiftieth minute, but let him vanish by pantomime hook in the fifteenth.

So the question the idea of the film asks - "Can you make a comedy about the Holocaust?" - can only be answered with "Well, perhaps, but not on the evidence of this one." A



'There shall be no more night': Among the gravestones of St Michael's Church, Mickleham, Surrey

Peter Macdarmid

more pertinent question may be why I went to see it, and why millions of others will do the same.

You can't blame the critics. Since I saw the film I've caught up (too late) with the reviews. One or two are enthusiastic but an equal number are hostile. Many are sympathetically lukewarm variations of David Denby's verdict in the *New*

Yorker: "I wish I could say it was anything but a mistake".

So why didn't I notice these reviews? Because I'm the victim of brilliant marketing strategies which fill the hungry spaces of newsprint and broadcast time. The film had sneakily and impressively recommended itself to me via profiles of Benigni, interviews with his associates, features

which put the pros and cons of breaking "the Holocaust taboo"

- all prominently and fancily displayed on the page, a review by contrast is a simple, humble thing) and all before the product itself could be honestly scrutinised by independent men and women whose judgement we might trust.

Certain generations (including mine) often talk nos-

talgically of the days of the "great critics": Ken Tynan,

Harold Hobson, Penelope Gilliat, Clive James, and other writers who in their day were often the best reason for buying a Sunday newspaper.

I think this may well be unfair to the present lot, whose voices could be equally strong and persuasive if they could be heard from under the blankets

of PR-inspired journalism ("Come on set, meet the star", which surrounded them. I feel sorry for their fall and promise to pay them more attention.)

In the meantime, an empty chair to *Life is Beautiful*, though the Pope is reported to love it. On the one hand, Roberto Benigni; on the other, General Pinochet. A pontiff of truly catholic taste.

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The Hair and the Tortoise wait on Wales

WHEN RHODRI MORGAN and Alun Michael last competed against each other, in the London marathon, the maverick backbencher beat the current Secretary of State for Wales by more than an hour.

As the gruelling race to become Labour candidate for First Secretary of Wales reaches its climax today, they will be virtually neck and neck this time as they stumble over the line.

The only certainty is that Tony Blair will be sweating more than either of the contestants.

After three months of vitriol, back-biting and claim and counter-claim, the party's choice to lead it into May's Welsh Assembly elections will finally be announced in Cardiff today. Labour officials will unveil the result in a hotel overlooking Cardiff Bay, the shiny new development and site of the Assembly that aims to symbolise the dynamic New Wales.

However, the outcome itself will be decided by a typically Old Wales Labour device of an electoral college that stacks up votes with a Byzantine complexity.

In a system that Michael supporters quaintly depict as reflecting the Labour "family", and Morgan supporters describe as a "stitch-up", the college is split into three equal parts.

Trade unions and affiliated organisations make up the first

BY PAUL WAUGH
Political Correspondent

section, MPs, MEPs and Assembly candidates make up the second, while the humble individual party members make up the third.

A combination of educated guesses and declared intentions suggests that Mr Michael has won most trade union votes, an outcome confirmed by the GMB's crucial backing for him yesterday. With the MPs and candidates section also likely to go, by a slim margin, for the Secretary of State, the deciding vote will be down to the 25,000 party members.

Mr Morgan is widely anticipated to come out on top among the grass roots, but he may need 70 per cent of the votes to win. The margin of overall victory could be 0.5 per cent. Or, as the candidate himself succinctly puts it, "as tight as a goat's arse".

Since it was precipitated by Ron Davies's "moment of madness" on Clapham Common in south London last October, nothing about this contest has been straightforward.

Mr Morgan, MP for Cardiff West, began as favourite after coming second to Big Ron in the leadership fight last year. Quick-witted and always armed with a ready quote, polls showed that he was much more popu-

lar with the public than the dogged, taciturn Mr Michael.

The cheery, garrulous Morgan approach was exemplified by his response to whether he would stand again for the First Secretary's job: "Does a one-legged duck swim in circles?"

Renowned for his laid-back dress sense, Mr Morgan had even undergone something of a makeover to help his chances. His lumberjack shirts and tracksuits were swapped for neat jacket-and-tie combos. His trademark unruly hair, once a proud Afro to rival Don King's, was trimmed to respectability.

However, the great race of the Tortoise and the Hair soon descended into bitterness, with each side flinging mud enthusiastically about the other's tactics, character and ability.

Mr Michael, 55, was derided as a Taffy-come-lately, a man with little commitment or interest in Wales and devolution. For his part, 59-year-old Mr Morgan was accused of being a "crypto-nationalist" after some of his supporters were alleged to have called for a break-away Wales Labour Party.

While the polls showed that most Labour members backed Mr Morgan, it became clear that the contest could be decided by the block votes of a handful of trade unionists. Those unions who did ballot members invariably came out for the



Rhodri Morgan on a visit to a farm as he campaigned to be Labour's candidate for First Secretary of the new Welsh Assembly. Rob Straton

backbencher by huge margins.

Local parties were also furious about the new list system for MEPs and the Assembly and were forced to accept candidates imposed by the party executive. Mr Michael became a candidate on the top-up list in Mid and West Wales despite the opposition of local members.

When Mr Blair decided to make three trips to Wales to bolster the chances of his Welsh Secretary, it became clear that

for the Labour leadership this was much more than a little local difficulty in an obscure internal party contest. It was a trial of strength for New Labour.

"It has been the worst combination of Old Labour vote-rigging and New Labour control freakery," concluded Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West.

Both men have tried to stick to meaty issues such as jobs, education and health, but with so few powers available to any

future Prime Minister of Wales, the contest has inevitably centred on personalities.

His opponents claim that Mr Morgan is too much of a "clown", he is "unserious", "a sayer not a doer" who has no experience of running government. None of the barbs appear to have unsettled him. "I think you have to have broad shoulders in any election campaign."

"If you've ever played rugby, there's always going to be a lot

of barging in the line-out and elbowing in the teeth," he explained. "But after the game you have to just go into the bar and have a pint with the person who thumped you. You forget all about it over faggots and peas."

On the eve of the all-important vote, Mr Michael also claimed to have enjoyed the contest, though he admitted he was "relieved" it was nearly over. "I have enjoyed it far more than I expected."

"The idea that I'm some sort of Downing Street poodle is totally untrue. Tony Blair knows that I can be a terrier and I will fight my corner."

When Wales meets Ireland at Wembley in the Five Nations this afternoon, both men will be settling down to watch the game on television. A meeting for a pint over faggots and peas is, however, as likely as one-legged ducks swimming in a straight line.

Six councils warned their libraries are sub-standard

CHRIS SMITH, the Secretary of State for Culture, has admitted that some of Britain's libraries are under threat. Yesterday Mr Smith wrote to 21 local councils demanding they improve their library services and has threatened six with a full investigation by his department.

The proposed cutbacks are an embarrassment to the Government.

BY DAVID LISTER
Arts News Editor

ernment in what is the National Year of Reading. For the first time all 149 local authorities have been obliged to submit their future plans to the Government.

Mr Smith said yesterday that 15 would be asked to carry out a full investigation by his department.

plans, and six others would be receiving written warnings.

Though the Government is not making the names of any of the offenders public, the six worst are understood to be: Barnsley, which is considering the closure of all its 23 branch libraries, retaining only a central library and two mobile libraries; South, where 25 of the

smaller libraries might be closed; and the London boroughs of Islington, which has proposed closing libraries on weekdays; Brent, where up to three libraries might be closed and opening hours reduced; Lambeth and Haringey, which have both proposed closing some libraries.

An added embarrassment

for Mr Smith is that one of the six worst offenders, Islington, contains his own constituency.

Statistics given in a recent House of Commons debate showed that nationally, 10 years ago, more than 200 public libraries opened for 60 hours or more. Today the number has declined by 49 per cent and the number open for 45-60 hours

has declined by 19 per cent. Mr Smith said: "Local libraries lie at the heart of local communities across the country, and the Government believes they have a key role to play as 'street corner universities' in promoting education as well as in tackling social exclusion by giving 'information to have-nots' with access to new technology that

they would not otherwise have." He said most local authorities had library services "we can all be proud of" but pledged to ensure that others provided a comprehensive and efficient service.

This means that he could declare some councils in default of their statutory obligations and order them to restore cuts.

No government has yet taken this course of action in regard to libraries, but Mr Smith said yesterday he would do so if necessary.

"I shall examine in detail the rationale behind proposed service reductions. I am therefore taking immediate steps to investigate the situation in a number of authorities."

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Pinochet and policing prove tougher than jobs for Straw

NEXT WEEK will be a difficult one for Jack Straw - much more difficult than the comparatively easy time he has had over his proposals to lock up people with severe personality disorders or encourage the public to have a go at jobs.

First there will be the publication of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report, followed by the law lords' verdict on the extradition of General Augusto Pinochet.

The Lawrence report, expected on Tuesday, will herald a shake-up of the police in tackling racism. If the report finds that there have been serious cases of police misconduct, Mr Straw will face calls for the resignation of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Paul Condon.

At the same time Mr Straw will be praying that the Pinochet saga will finally come to an end, with the lords ruling that the former dictator is sent back to Chile. The Home Secretary is fed up with the issue dominating his in-tray, and having already proved his credentials with Labour left-wingers by supporting the earlier ruling, is now anxious for their lordships to give him a break.

Apart from the issue itself, Mr Straw would also like to end the constant harassment by Lord Lamont of Lerwick, who yesterday elicited information that even the Pope has been lobbying the Foreign Office on behalf of the general.

Lord Lamont has been tabling irritating questions, including one about a visit made to Chile 33 years ago by Mr Straw, asking whether he engaged in any political activity while he was there. Lord Williams, the Home Office minister, replied that Mr Straw "at this distance cannot recall anything which could be defined as political activity".

But Lord Lamont is persistent, and ascertained that Mr Straw published an article, in October 1966, in *Tribune* on the prospects of reform under the then Chilean government.

THE POLITICAL fall-out on the genetically modified food panic fell equally on both main parties. William Hague, who started the scare a fortnight ago during Prime Minister's Questions, inspired John Redwood to score easy runs, initially against the Department of Trade and Industry minister Lord Sainsbury of Turville. Mr Redwood worked relentlessly to bring into the public domain a possible conflict of interest where Lord Sainsbury was concerned.

With Mr Redwood on the case there was a good chance the Tories might have drawn blood - and even another DIT minister's resignation. But, concerned that Mr Redwood would get the limelight, the Tories foolishly went off on another tack by switching to the issue of food safety, setting up an unevenly matched parliamentary battle between their agriculture spokesman, Tim Yeo, and the wily Brummie food minister, Geoff Rooker, who knocked Mr Yeo for six by exposing the Tories' complicity in GM food development when they were in office.

Tony Blair badly misread public opinion and, echoing John Gummer, who tried to reassure public opinion by stuffing beef burgers down his six-year-old daughter, tried to claim that because he ate it, the funny food must be safe.

Nick Brown, the Agriculture Minister, craftily uttered not a word, neither in Parliament nor to the media, preferring to attend to his ministerial duties in Europe while letting Jack Cunningham take the strain on the airwaves.

But the pressure on the Government to slow down the pace of GM food will build as Labour MPs are beginning to be overwhelmed by their postbags.

The regular MP-baiters who write at the drop of a hat are gearing themselves up to gum up the works of members' correspondence - the most effective way of getting backbenchers to run panicking to ministers.

Mr Hague has proved how easy it is to start a food scare, but the real achieve-



THE WEEK IN WESTMINSTER
MICHAEL BROWN

ment is stopping one. That is the test now for Mr Blair and his ministers.

CONSERVATIVE WAY Forward and Aims of Industry are hosting a grand "International Free Enterprise Dinner" on 20 April to mark the 20th anniversary of Margaret Thatcher being elected as prime minister (tickets: £125).

Baroness Thatcher is said to be delighted that Sir Edward Heath has accepted an invitation, and to confirm that media stories of constant war between the two former prime ministers are invariably wide of the mark.

The two circled each other before exchanging pleasantries at last year's Tory party conference. Both agreed on the discomfort of being wedged into the infamous Ikea chairs, where they looked similarly fed up at the chaotic proceedings.

In fact there is more than grudging respect between the two old war-horses for each other's longevity. It is often forgotten that they both began their political careers together in Kent fighting nearby seats in the 1950 general election, when they spoke on behalf of each other in their respective constituencies.

The Baroness attended Sir Edward's party to mark his 40 years as MP for Old Bexley and Sidcup when she was prime minister. Sir Edward's recently published autobiography records a photograph of a dinner that Lady Thatcher held at Downing Street for the then five surviving prime ministers, including Sir Edward.

NO FORMER Conservative MP has made it to the last seven in the race to be the Tory candidate for the super-safe seat of Leominster, where local Tories are looking for a replacement for Peter Temple-Morris, who defected to Labour last year.

Heading the pack is William Hague's back-room office boy, 27-year-old George Osborne. The others are Richard Bacon, who fought Vauxhall last time; Richard Ashworth, who fought Devon North; Bill Wiggan (son of former MP Sir Gerry Wiggan), who fought Burnley; Hugo Swire, who fought Greenock and Inverclyde (nephew of the former minister, Sir John Nott), and Colonel Patrick Mercer, seen as the local man.

The smart money is on a fight to the finish between Mr Osborne and Colonel Mercer. The local party executive will whittle the names down to three next week, with a full ballot of party members on Friday 5 March.

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SCIENCE



Dr Arpad Pusztai: forced to retire as the victim of a conspiracy or author of flawed research?

PA

Pusztai: the verdict

GM food: safe or unsafe? First we must ask experts in this field how they rate the research work that led to this most recent controversy, says Steve Connor

The case of Arpad Pusztai – the scientist forced to retire over his public comments about genetically modified (GM) potatoes – has become a cause célèbre with the environmentalists. He claims to have shown that GM food can stunt the growth of laboratory rats, harm brain development and damage the immune system. If he is right, it represents a hammer-blow to the biotechnology industry, which is keen to exploit advances in genetics. If he is wrong, Dr Pusztai could be accused of whipping up public hysteria.

Last week, a group of 20 scientists signed a memo in support of Dr Pusztai, stating that the Hungarian-born researcher stands fully vindicated. Dr Pusztai's data from experiments he conducted at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen clearly show, the memo says, that when laboratory rats were fed GM potatoes, their internal organs failed to grow fully and their immune systems were suppressed. They concluded that Dr Pusztai's research report would be acceptable for publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

It is this last claim that has been put to the test by *The Independent*. Dr Pusztai's report became publicly available this week, and we asked one of Britain's leading experts, Professor Tom Sanders of King's College London, to comment on whether it would pass muster with genuine scientific referees. Professor Sanders concludes (see below) that Pusztai's work fails to reach a standard acceptable for a peer-reviewed journal.

Science is only science if it has passed through review by experts before being published in a journal. The 20 "experts", mostly from abroad, who signed the memo say Pusztai's research is of high quality. This is not the view of other scientists who saw it.

The story began in 1995, when the Scottish Office funded a three-year project involving three centres: the Rowett, Durham University and the Scottish Crop Research Institute. The aim was

to identify ways of making crops pest-resistant, with minimum side-effects. Dr Pusztai's role, as an expert on toxic plant proteins called lectins, was to undertake a series of feeding experiments using GM potatoes and laboratory rats. His particular interest was a lectin called GNA, found in the bulbs of snowdrops, which acts as a natural pesticide. According to Dr Pusztai's report no other lectin-producing GM plants were used in the experiments, although he does say he performed some "analytical" work with GM potatoes expressing another, more toxic lectin, Con A, from the jackbean plant.

This is a key point because, according to an audit investigation into Dr Pusztai's work (ordered by the Rowett following his statements on TV's *World in Action*), he had become confused over whether he was talking about GM potatoes expressing GNA or ordinary potatoes which had Con A added to them in concentrations 5,000 times greater than would occur naturally. The audit, conducted by four scientists, two from the Rowett and two from outside, concluded that the only time the rats in the Pusztai experiment showed any signs of stunted growth was when they were fed Con A in these high concentrations.

Therefore, the audit committee is of the opinion that the existing data do not support any suggestion that the consumption of rats of transgenic potatoes expressing GNA has an effect on the growth, organ development or immune function," the audit report stated. In answer to this criticism, Dr Pusztai compiled his own "alternative report" in which he details what he did and the results he obtained. It is this report, which his supporters claim to be of sufficient standard for publication in a peer-

reviewed journal, which we passed to Professor Sanders.

Dr Pusztai fed the rats a diet of raw, baked or boiled potatoes. Some of the potatoes, he says, were genetically modified with the GNA lectin and some had GNA added to unmodified potatoes. A diet that solely consists of potatoes is so nutritionally poor that he sometimes added a protein supplement, otherwise the experiment would breach Home Office regulations limiting the suffering of animals. Two types of feeding trial took place: one over a 10-day period, the other over 100 days. His report states there was only one 100-day experiment, where extensive protein supplements had to be used. He found the liver weights of the animals in this trial actually improved when they were fed GM potatoes, and put this down to the protein supplement. Dr Pusztai said the long-term trial was only preliminary.

parent line. This again indicated that digestion and absorption of nutrients of transgenic potato diets was retarded in comparison with ordinary potato diets," Dr Pusztai writes.

A test of the rats' immune systems during this experiment also indicated that the animals fed transgenic potatoes were almost always more suppressed. Dr Pusztai claims that when free GNA was added to a diet of unmodified potatoes, he did not see this suppression. In other words, there was something about the act of genetic modification itself that has led to the effect he has observed. Environmentalists jumped on this as evidence that all GM food is unsafe.

Dr Pusztai's conclusions were unambiguous: "Four feeding trials were carried out ... In all four experiments, feeding transgenic potatoes to rats induced major and in most instances highly significant changes in the weights of some or most of their vital organs ... The growth rate of rats fed potato diets was slightly but significantly less than that of rats fed a high-quality control diet, but the presence of GNA, whether added to potato-based diets or expressed in the transgenic (plant) had no significant effect on weight gain and weight change compared to parent potato lines."

Dr Pusztai's two outside collaborators at the Scottish Crop Research Institute and the University of Durham have distanced themselves from his conclusions. John Gatehouse, at Durham, is understood to be privately furious at Dr Pusztai's failure "to consider the most elementary tenet of science – that before one reaches a conclusion about cause and effect, it is necessary to demonstrate that causality exists."

Meanwhile, the four members of the original audit committee have looked at Dr Pusztai's alternative report and found that it is not convincing.

Dr Pusztai may have convinced the 20 scientists who signed the memo, and certain sections of the media, but he has failed to win over the experts – including his own colleagues – who are closest to the research.

group is not given. ... Many of the reported differences are not significant.

"I would not recommend this paper be accepted for publication in its current form. In my experience as an editor and reviewer it would be rejected by the *British Journal of Nutrition*, *Journal of Nutrition* and *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Although the report is of poor quality, the subject matter is novel so I would not to reject it outright even though the first three studies are fundamentally flawed in their design (deficient in protein). I would invite the author to respond to detailed criticisms and consider a revised version with more detail and suggest further studies, particularly with regard to the lymphocyte proliferation studies [a test of the immune system], which are unconvincing."



Tom Sanders, professor of nutrition at King's College London, is one of the most distinguished food toxicologists in Britain. He is a member of the Government's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, and has acted as an expert reviewer for some of the leading scientific journals in the field. This is an edited version of his peer review of Dr Arpad Pusztai's "alternative report", which environmentalists have used to support a ban on genetically modified food.

"THIS DOCUMENT reports four feeding studies with transgenic potatoes. The document has not been carefully prepared and is not up to the standard required for publication in a good scientific journal. The tables are not clear, and the captions do not make it clear whether the results are expressed as mean with SEM or SD [two statistical ways of expressing the possible error in calculating an average]. The food intakes are not adequately described – this data is essential for interpretation of the data. The dietary design of the first three studies is fundamentally flawed, as the diets did not contain adequate amounts of protein and the intake of nutrients and antinutrients differed between the transgenic and control animals.

"An intake of 100g protein/kg diet is regarded as the minimum amount for growing rats, and results in some degree of malnutrition, particularly when under stress such as pregnancy. Most commercial rat diets contain protein at 200g/kg diet to support normal growth. The first three studies use between 55.6 and 72.5g protein/kg. This level of protein was not adequate to sustain normal growth and development in the rats. The transgenic potatoes contained 20 per cent less protein than the parent variety but it appears no attempt was made to ensure that the protein content of the diets was similar. Thus differences between the parent variety and the transgenic animals could be attributed to differences in protein intake.

"It is unclear why a diet of raw potatoes was used, given that they are renowned for containing high levels of natural toxins. The study generalises conclusions made from the use of raw potatoes to the use of cooked potatoes.

"It is well documented that protein malnutrition in rats leads to decreased growth rate, changes in gut morphology and hepatic atrophy features that were observed in these studies. The report gives the impression that these dietary aspects of the study were considered post hoc. Why were the potatoes

not analysed before the diets were formulated? And why was the lower protein content in the transgenic line not compensated for by additional protein?"

How to get blood out of a bone...



The potential for transforming human cells sets Lewis Wolpert's pulse racing, in this, the first of his new columns

WOW! IT IS very rare that I have such a strong reaction to a scientific paper, a real surprise and a sense of astonishment. Most papers in the journals add to the body of knowledge and, while they can be very interesting, excitement is rare. The last time I had such a reaction was over 10 years ago, when I first saw pictures of the zebra-like stripes of gene expression in the early fruit-fly embryo that foreshadowed the formation of the fly's body segments.

The new work comes from Italy and shows how cells in the brain are much more clever and versatile than anyone could have imagined.

During development of our brain, and that of all vertebrates, there is a layer of cells lining the wall of the tube that will give rise to the brain that gives rise to all the nerve cells, neurons, of the brain. These are stem cells.

When they divide into two daughter cells, the innermost daughter cell becomes a neuron and migrates away from the wall. The other daughter cell remains attached to the wall and becomes now a mother cell as the process is repeated, and again the inner daughter becomes a neuron. Only recently has evidence been provided which shows that, even in the adult brain, there are still stem cells that can divide to give rise to neurons.

This has very important implications, as nerve cell themselves cannot divide to give more nerve cells, but can only come from stem cells and these were thought to disappear when growth and development

were completed. There is thus in the adult brain the capacity to make new nerve cells, and so repair and replace nerve cells that may be lost due to damage or disease processes.

There were also a few reports that things were even more remarkable, as muscle cells were observed in the brain and were quite common in a particular type of brain tumour. But muscle cells have a quite different origin from that of nerve cells. They come from a region of the embryo thought to be as different from that from which nerve cells come as a

blood cells have only a life of a few weeks. If the division of these stem cells is blocked, by for example, X-irradiation, blood cell formation ceases with very serious consequences. But it is possible to rescue the situation by injecting stem cells from another animal.

With a high-risk experiment – that is, with the chance of success being very low – the researchers injected the brain stem cells into the mice that had been irradiated to see if the brain stem cells could populate the bone marrow and, in their new environment, be persuaded to make blood cells. The mice did very well and, five months later, they had unequivocal evidence – the mice blood cells had come from the neural stem cells that they had injected. They were sure because the cells they had injected carried a molecular marker that made them distinguishable from those of the mouse into whom they had been injected.

No one yet knows how the cells in the bone marrow instructed the neural stem cells to make blood cells. It is totally unexpected that signals exist which can transform one cell type into another – English into Sanskrit.

But it opens up many exciting possibilities to manipulate stem cells recently isolated from early human embryos. These cells were trumpeted as being the answer to various tissue replacement procedures, from heart muscle to insulin-producing cells and liver. I suspected there was more hype than hope, but this new work suggests I was rather pessimistic.

Signals can transform one cell type into another

Sanskrit sentence is from one in English. Yet some cell biologists began to speculate that brain stem cells might have a greater potential for development than anyone had thought possible.

They therefore began to grow stem cells from the brains of mice. They did this by putting the cells in a dish with the right culture medium, where they multiplied. They then wondered if these cells could give rise to blood-forming cells that have an origin similar to that of muscle. Blood in all vertebrates comes from stem cells in, for example, the bone marrow. Stem cells there divide and give rise to all our red and white blood cells and are very active, as our red



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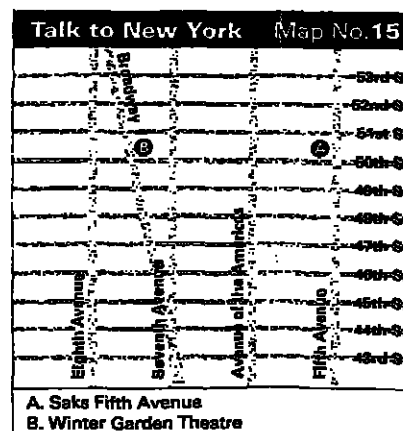
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THE INDEPENDENT

Frinton is braced for loosening of moral standards



The living is easy at Frinton-on-Sea in Essex - just do not ask for a drink. There are no pubs and the locals want to keep it that way

Tom Craig

A SMALL boy was flying his kite on the greensward as his grandfather leant on his stick and looked on admiringly. The beach huts were shut for winter and the evenly spaced wooden seats looking on to the North Sea were empty.

BY CLARE GARNER

when one goes inside the Maplin Hotel on the esplanade and asks for a drink. Frintonians would not be so foolish.

Nick Turner, owner of the Maplin, bristled at the request. "No," was the short answer, followed by the fuller explanation: "Here, a full licence is a pub -

a public house - which means the public can come into it."

He did not have one - and nor would he want to. A pub in Frinton would change Frinton forever, he said.

A level crossing provides a symbolic barrier between Frinton proper and the modern part of the town. "Inside the gates," as locals like to say, is

the "holy part of Frinton", where all vulgar aspects of modern life have been resolutely resisted. Indeed, if Winston Churchill was to return today, he would be hard

pressed to find any changes in the seaside resort where he holidayed during the world wars.

However, after Tendring Council's decision to allow JF

Wetherspoon to build a pub on the town's main street, anything could happen. Or so Frintonians think.

Roy Caddick, 63, the secretary of the Frinton Residents' Association, described the day that the Wetherspoon proposal was accepted as the worst in Frinton since "the Luftwaffe beat up the town in 1945".

Subsequent word from nearby Braintree has reinforced his opinion. "A Wetherspoon pub has opened in Braintree and residents absolutely dread Friday and Saturday nights now. The youngsters descend on the town, tank up on cheap beer and cause mayhem," he said. "They slam car doors, they roar up the street, and

there's vomit on the pavement the next morning. People don't have a drink in Frinton, but at least we don't get riots and all the other awful things that you read about elsewhere."

Win Shelton, 78, a long-standing member of Frinton's town council, is equally apprehensive about the "late hours activity". She said: "You know, we haven't got all the razzmatazz that other places have. It's a haven. We don't have the candy floss or amusements."

JF Wetherspoon is anxious to allay the town's fears. The pub will be "straightforward and gimmick-free" with no music whatsoever, live or background. There will be wheelchair access and "nothing going on inside", said a spokesman.

But no amount of pandering is going to change the minds of the elderly residents, who are planning to take their "case of injustice" to the local government ombudsman.

John Lowe, landlord of the Essex Skipper, situated "outside the gates", and a self-elected founder member of the Fossils (Frinton-on-Sea Invisible Landlord Society), does

not feel threatened by the arrival of a Wetherspoon pub.

"If they've got a better cook than my missus I'll jack it in - because I know they don't," he said. "I don't like the concept that you buy cheap, sell cheap and sod everyone else."

His pub has a dart board, jukebox and fruit machines and welcomes families (unlike Wetherspoon pubs).

The fact that the new pub will have "nothing going on inside" was no cause for cheer, he added. "It's just cheap beer and nothing else; it's not a community service."

However some residents - even some elderly ones - believe that the Frinton known to George Bernard Shaw and Edward, The Prince of Wales, and Mrs Simpson should wake up to the 20th century before the 21st arrives. The town described by Ursula Bloom, who also wrote under the name Lozania Prole, in her book *Rosemary for Frinton*, is laughably out of date. "I think we should have the pub," said George Francis. "It would revitalise the town, which would be a damn good idea."

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Football coach admits sex with girl, 15

CHELSEA FOOTBALL coach Graham Rix was warned by a judge yesterday that he faced imprisonment after admitting having unlawful sex with a 15-year-old girl.

The 41-year-old former Arsenal and England star, who has been married for 17 years and has four children, admitted one charge of having unlawful sexual intercourse with the girl and one of indecently assaulting her in January last year. But he denied two further counts of indecently assaulting her.

The prosecution accepted the not guilty pleas at yesterday's hearing at London's Knightsbridge Crown Court and the case was adjourned until 26 March to await the preparation of reports.

Renewing Rix's bail on condition that he did not contact the girl or her family "either directly or indirectly", Judge Timothy Pontius told him: "The fact that I'm about to release you on bail and the fact that I have ordered a report should not for a moment be taken by you as an indication of the sentence you will ultimately receive."

"Because of the gravity of these offences, I must keep all my sentencing options open and they include, perhaps in the forefront, imprisonment."

Rix, of Richmond, southwest London, who was capped for England 17 times, is regarded as one of the country's top coaches and helps to manage



Graham Rix: Released on bail to await sentencing

Chelsea's expensive line-up of foreign stars. He is assistant to the former Italian international Gianluca Vialli.

Laura Cobbs, for the prosecution, told the court that Rix's guilty pleas were acceptable to the Crown. It was not intended to proceed with the remaining allegations, which would now "lay on the file".

Desmond de Silva QC, for the defence, told the judge that Rix was of hitherto impeccable character, and added that he felt the court would be assisted by a pre-sentence report in "this exceptional case". The judge agreed and put the case back for five weeks. Rix then left the dock to see a probation officer.

The maximum sentence for having unlawful sex with a girl under 16 is two years and for indecent assault 10 years.

Politicians top of bad breath league

POLITICIANS AND lawyers may be blessed with the gift of the gab but many have bad breath.

Professor Mel Rosenberg, a microbiologist, told a British Dental Association conference yesterday that politicians, lawyers, judges, MPs and teachers were more likely to have "dragon-mouth" because they were forever talking.

"Their mouths dry out as they talk and when your mouth dries out, the saliva, the body's mouthwash, cannot carry away the bacteria. Also the movement of the tongue air the smelly gases and sends them out."

BY CATHY COMERFORD

More than 100 dentists attended a seminar given by the Israeli scientist in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire.

Professor Rosenberg has studied bad breath for more than 15 years. He believes that Stratford resident William Shakespeare, who wrote a lot about good and bad breath, may have suffered from it. He said: "Although the causes of the condition are still uncertain today, primitive health care during the 16th century would mean many may well have suffered the condition."

Hype is out of style in London

Chunnel has be rail trou



A McQueen show: the designer wants to boost US sales

Hype is out of style in London

LONDON FASHION Week kicks off this weekend and while, for the past few seasons, Britain's fashion capital has managed to live up to the hype of recent years, this season the future looks less rosy.

The Cool Britannia moniker is nothing short of derisory these days. Yesterday's decidedly uncool press call, the brainchild of the beleaguered British Fashion Council (BFC), featuring Wonderbra model Adriana Sklenarikova with "I love London" emblazoned across her bra and shorts, didn't help much. This, coupled with over-stated reports in the press of a mass exodus on the part of our designers to more lucrative and sunny climes (Milan and New York, to be precise) has only fuelled speculation that there are bad times ahead.

Antonio Berardi - it is true

BY SUSANNAH FRANKEL
Fashion Editor

- has decamped to Milan; as an established designer he is not unwise to have moved on to a more commercially motivated fashion capital. Vivienne Westwood showed her Red Label diffusion line in New York last week. She did so more to publicise the opening of her new shop there than because of any antipathy towards London, where she continues to live and work. Philip Treacy also showed in New York, although he will show in London next week also. He has done this once before. More serious, however, is the fact that Alexander McQueen, it was yesterday confirmed, will almost certainly be showing in New York next season.

"We need to build up our business there," said a Mc-

Queen spokeswoman. "We do well in New York and in Los Angeles but so far there's very little happening in between."

She stressed, though, that London-born McQueen would be returning to London the season after that.

This is not the first time our big-name designers have moved on, however. Most famous was the departure of John Galiano to Paris in the early Nineties. Katharine Hamnett, Rifat Ozbek and Westwood again all left London for Paris once they had outgrown the still relatively small business infrastructure that supports our designers.

What's more, their departure

made way for younger designers, McQueen included, to make their mark.

More than any other fashion capital, London is famous for showcasing fledgling design talent, too raw to penetrate the still far more bourgeois fashion capitals of Milan, Paris and New York.

To this end, next week's series of shows includes an unofficial schedule that boasts names like Shelley Fox. She is the recent recipient of the first Jerwood Fashion Prize, the largest award of its kind to date and a business back-up for designers. There is also a debut collection by Markus Lupfer, who was formerly a de-

sign assistant at Clements Ribeiro and also a Jerwood finalist.

On the official schedule, meanwhile, Robert Cary-Williams, Tristan Webber, Seraph and Mulligan are all names to watch.

Despite rumours otherwise, Hussein Chalayan - expected to win British Designer of the Year - is showing in London for now. This, coupled with showings by more established names - Ghost, Paul Smith, Betty Jackson and Jasper Conran, to name just a few - makes London more than worth looking at. Simon Wilson, chief executive at the BFC, said yesterday: "We are hoping that overseas

attendance figures will be higher than ever this season - 2,000 press and buyers are expected to come through the doors."

Among them will be American Vogue's Anna Wintour, flying in for this season, as well as senior buyers from both America and Europe.

More good news comes from Vidal Sassoon, who announced last week that he will continue to sponsor London Fashion Week for the next five years, to the tune of £2.2m.

By international standards, it may still be early days for London but it would be wise for people to allow it to build on the considerable impression it has made up until now.



Adriana Sklenarikova, Wonderbra model, launches London Fashion Week. Below: A model shows Alexander McQueen's last collection

Reuters, Peter Macdiarmid



Chunnel 'hard man' to be rail troubleshooter

SIR ALASTAIR Morton, the former "hard man" in charge of Eurotunnel, is expected to be appointed by John Prescott, Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, to head a new strategic rail authority to enforce higher standards on Railtrack.

Sir Alastair, who also acted as a consultant to Peter Mandelson on the Millennium Dome project in Greenwich, south London, is being brought in to tackle the dismal record of Railtrack under its chairman Sir Robert Horton.

Mr Prescott has called a rail summit for 25 February to order Railtrack and the privatised rail companies to improve their services.

Sir Alastair, 61, established a reputation as a hard-hitting executive with a record for fighting for the interests of the small shareholders when he was co-chairman of the company that built the Channel Tunnel.

In Whitehall, Sir Alastair is regarded as a "big animal in the jungle" who will be strong enough to take on Railtrack. He is privately compared to

BY COLIN BROWN
Chief Political Correspondent

Chris Woodhead, the head of the schools inspectorate, for insisting on higher standards. "He will be able to put some stick about," one source said.

Sir Alastair will take up his duties in April, and the new strategic authority for the rail services - backed up by legislation - will give him wide-ranging powers to raise performance levels.

Mr Prescott, who has attacked the privatised railway services as a "national disgrace", believes raising standards is vital if he is to succeed in encouraging more motorists to leave their cars at home.

A damning report on Railtrack will provide plenty of ammunition for Mr Prescott at next Thursday's summit. It accuses Railtrack, which runs the track services used by the rail companies, of failing to invest effectively in modernisation and questions the direction of its planned £17bn investment project over the next 10 years.

Accusing Railtrack of failing to deliver on its commitments, the report is expected to claim that it has failed to invest consistently in many areas, particularly its Great Western Zone, covering South Wales and the South-west.

Railtrack's profit forecast this year has risen to £400m, with access fees of £2bn a year from the rail companies.

The report, by the management consultancy Booz Allen and Hamilton, was commissioned by the rail regulator last year to review Railtrack's performance, and has sparked speculation in the City that Mr Prescott may order Railtrack to reduce its payments to shareholders to invest more in raising standards.

He could reduce the access charges Railtrack levies on the train operators with a regular six-monthly performance review.

Railtrack said yesterday that Sir Robert would respond to the criticism next week when the report is published, and he is expected to come out fighting. Railtrack claims the number of



Alastair Morton: 'Big animal in the jungle'

train delays for which it can be blamed has fallen by 40 per cent, but the management consultants' report says most of the improvement was achieved in the first year.

'Stop using historic locos' says Railtrack

THEY MAY bring a tear to the eye of the trainspotter but the sight of retired locomotives pulling passenger services has made Railtrack see red.

Train companies have been told to stop using "heritage" diesel engines to cope with the growth in rail travel and make up for a shortage of rolling stock. The increasing number of preserved trains normally found on private railways or in museums being used for regular timetabled services has prompted Railtrack to impose a moratorium. It said operators were putting rail safety at risk by hiring museum pieces for regular use without getting the necessary approval.

It is understood that three companies have been hit by the ban, although other operators are using heritage diesels with Railtrack's agreement. In one case, passengers had to endure unheated carriages after the train company was stopped from using a heritage engine.

A company spokesman said: "Railtrack has become aware of an increasing trend in the use of heritage rail vehicles on reg-

BY PHILIP THORNTON
Transport Correspondent

ular scheduled passenger services. [It] is concerned about the impact that this growing trend may have on the overall risk on the network."

Railtrack said modern trains were safer than older ones, which were taken out of service to improve safety. "A trend in reintroducing de-registered vehicles on regular scheduled services would inhibit, and may even reverse, this incremental safety improvement." The company, the custodian of railway safety, has to approve each operator's operation - known as the "safety case".

The problem arises when firms use locomotives not mentioned in the safety case. Railtrack said it would not accept any requests to run heritage locos on scheduled services for six months while it consults with the industry.

But the train companies say Railtrack is behaving anti-competitively by forcing them to search for spare, often inferior, rolling stock and run shorter

trains. They accuse Railtrack of inconsistency in banning the regular use of Class 50 engines, which were built in 1968 and only taken out of service in 1994, but allowing the use of 1957-built trains. Cardiff Railways said it had to hire trains without proper heating after Railtrack told it to stop using a 1968 locomotive. The ban has since been lifted. Anglia Railways has agreed not to use a Class 55 Deltic.

Alun Rees, general manager of the private Severn Valley Railway, which leased the Class 50 to Cardiff Valley, said he backed methods to maintain safety: "We have no intention whatsoever... to dilute safety but Railtrack's current stance is neither logical or helpful."

The preserved-railway community is angry with Railtrack and one member said it risked getting into "legal hot water" by implying some locos were unsafe. "What is heritage traction? If a 1968 Class 50 is banned but a 1957 diesel multiple unit is running around on daily service in the North, then the distinction is meaningless."

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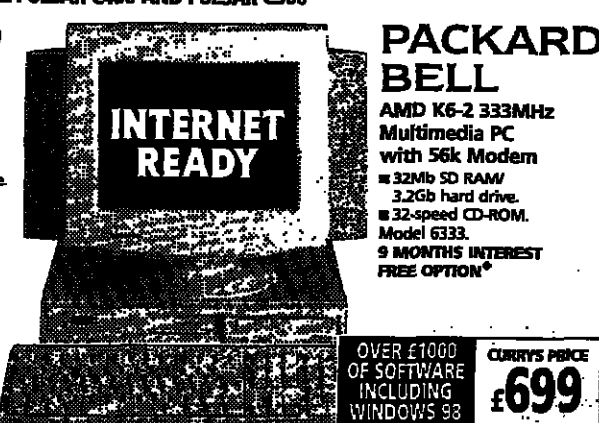


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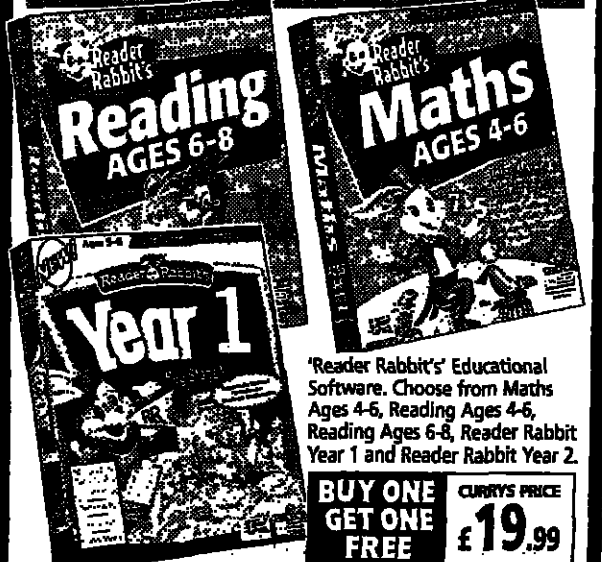
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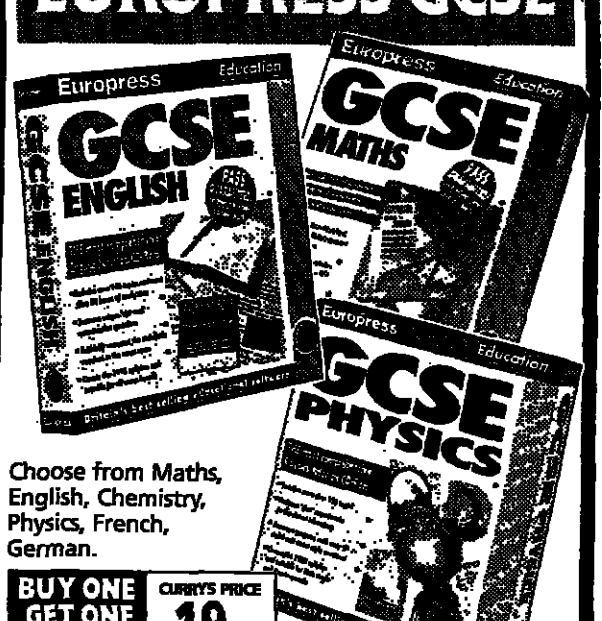
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Kurd outrage: Angry demonstrations across Europe over Ocalan's capture while London protesters appear in court

Embassy siege: 79 facing charges

THE 79 Kurds arrested after the three-day siege at the Greek embassy in London were all charged with violent disorder last night. Scotland Yard said those arrested, including at least four women and a number of asylum-seekers, would appear before Horseferry Road magistrates' court in central London.

The move follows angry protests from Kurdish campaigners after the occupiers were detained under anti-terrorism legislation as they emerged from the embassy in Holland Park shortly after 2pm on Thursday.

Meanwhile in Berlin, about a dozen Kurds laid a wreath outside the Israeli consulate, where three Kurds who tried to storm the building on Wednesday were shot dead by Israeli security guards.

Representatives of the group then spoke with the Israeli ambassador, Avi Primor. Mr Primor said afterwards that there was "no feud" between Israelis and Kurds, blaming "some kind of misunderstanding" for the rumours that set off the attempted occupation.

In Amsterdam today up to 4,000 Kurds plan to demonstrate against the seizure of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who is in a Turkish jail. Yesterday, a group of 44 Kurds arrested earlier this week after taking over the Greek ambassador's residence in The Hague stood trial on charges of unlawful detention of individuals, illegal entry and the destruction of personal property. Each faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Thousands of Kurds demon-

BY JOHN DAVISON

strated across the Middle East yesterday in support of Mr Ocalan, burning the Turkish flag in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, attacking Turkish trucks in Iran, and causing traffic chaos in Cyprus.

An estimated 3,000 to 5,000 protesters marched on the Lebanese parliament and prime ministerial offices in Beirut, demanding that the government intercede with Turkey to set Mr Ocalan free.

Mr Ocalan is well-known in Lebanon, where his group had training camps in the 1980s. He was last seen in Lebanon in 1992 at a guerrilla training camp.

In Nicosia, Cyprus, about 300 demonstrators waving PKK flags and chanting "Free Ocalan" marched through the city centre, bringing traffic to a standstill for an hour. Earlier, some 100 Kurds ended a hunger strike outside the Greek embassy. Before dispersing, they delivered a letter to the embassy demanding Mr Ocalan's release in the name of the PKK's political wing, the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan.

Greek Cypriot political leaders visited the protesters outside the embassy to express support. In Tehran, more than 2,000 Kurds stood outside the Turkish embassy, shouting "Turkey, we will burn you!" The protesters then marched through the Iranian capital. Elsewhere in Iran, 3,000 Kurds staged a demonstration in Mahabad, a city close to the border of Iraq and Turkey that was proclaimed the capital of Kurdistan early this century.



Kurds confront Romanian police yesterday as they tried to march on the Greek embassy in Bucharest to protest at the seizure of Abdullah Ocalan

Reuters

Ocalan's Greek comedy of errors

THE GREEK Prime minister, Costas Simitis, was at a social occasion when a colleague came to whisper the urgent message that Abdullah Ocalan had been smuggled into the country, according to the gossip among Athens diplomats.

The messenger was sympathetic to the Kurdish cause and wanted to know what Greece could do to help. Mr Simitis "nearly fainted with shock", one onlooker said. The anguished Prime Minister reportedly declared: "Don't do this to me!" before ordering that Mr Ocalan be removed as quickly and as quietly as possible.

Before finally falling into

BY PAUL WOOD
in Athens

Turkish hands, Mr Ocalan's search for political asylum saw him in Moscow, Rome, Minsk, Belarus, Athens and Corfu; and St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod. He had tried also without success to go to Paris, Bonn, Oslo, Stockholm, Bern, the Netherlands and Kiev.

Greece's effort to find him a haven began with a private citizen, Andonis Naxakis, a retired Greek naval officer with ties to the Kurdish rebels. Mr Naxakis arranged for Mr Ocalan to fly from St Petersburg to Athens on 29 January on a private plane.

Greek intelligence agents then took over and, according to some reports, acting on the Prime Minister's orders, they put Mr Ocalan back on the aircraft on 1 February, and it took off for Rotterdam.

Mr Ocalan thought he could arrive at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and argue the Kurdish cause. But he never landed. The Dutch turned his aircraft away, and it went back to Greece, landing on the island of Corfu.

Greek Foreign Ministry officials then took charge and sent Mr Ocalan to a Greek embassy property in Nairobi, where he could seek safe haven in a third

African country. What is known of the story of how Mr Ocalan was captured in Kenya sometimes reads like the plot of a bad spy novel. The first error made by the Greek security and foreign services supposedly looking after the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) leader was to send him to the Kenyan capital, where the United States has maintained an intelligence presence ever since its embassy was bombed.

Diplomats say Mr Ocalan was detected by an American listening post because he used his mobile phone. Negotiations between Mr Ocalan and government ministers in Athens

were also said to have taken place on an open telephone line, with the Turkish security services listening in.

Mr Ocalan reportedly demanded a false passport, money and an aircraft to take him to the Netherlands for another try at the international court. He appealed again for asylum in Italy, France, Greece or Russia, or even a trial in Germany.

It was during these negotiations last weekend that he lost patience and took the path which led to his downfall. He said he would start his own negotiations with the Kenyans.

"He was used to giving the orders and wouldn't take any

from us," said the Greek Foreign Minister, Theodoros Pangalos, who was sacked on Thursday. "He rejected our advice and started talking."

Mr Ocalan left the Greek embassy for the airport, followed by the Greek ambassador. Both thought the waiting aircraft would take Mr Ocalan to the Netherlands. Then Mr Ocalan's car "peeled off down a side street" - a result of Turkish infiltration of the scheme. Turkish commandos had flown into Nairobi for a mission code-named Safari and they bagged their big game - inflicting humiliation on the ancient foe, Greece, into the bargain.

Britain pledges troops for Timor peace-keeping force

BRITAIN HAS offered to send troops and money to East Timor for a United Nations-sponsored peace-keeping force. The troops would be deployed in the event of an Indonesian withdrawal, which might take place by the end of this year.

News of the offer was given by Jose Ramos Horta, overseas spokesman for the Timorese resistance, in an interview with *The Independent* yesterday in Hong Kong. He said Derek Fatchett, the Foreign Office minister responsible for Asia, had written to Xanana Gusmao, leader of the Timorese resistance, two days ago.

According to Mr Ramos Horta, Britain is one of the first powers to pledge support for a force which would help the former Portuguese colony prepare for independence. The letter was delivered by Britain's ambassador in Jakarta to the house where Mr Gusmao is being held after his release from prison a week ago.

"I'm very confident that the

BY STEPHEN VINES
in Hong Kong

United Kingdom would be a major contributor to Timor," said Mr Ramos Horta. He had special praise for the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, and the Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, who, he said, were "very sensitive towards East Timor and very aware that they have to make up for Britain's arms sales to Indonesia".

Mr Ramos Horta also noted Mr Fatchett's close involvement in the Timor issue, saying he had visited Mr Gusmao three times in the past year.

Next week talks are due between the foreign ministers of Portugal and Indonesia and James Mackenzie, the UN Secretary-General's special representative. They are trying to reach agreement on how the Timorese people will be consulted on plans for autonomy.

"We remain poles apart on this crucial issue," Mr Ramos-



Jose Ramos Horta: Praised Robin Cook's support

Horta said, "Jakarta refuses to have a referendum on self-determination." This is supported by the Portuguese and most UN members.

Indonesia is saying that if the Timorese reject its proposals for a degree of autonomy within the Indonesian state, they will pack up and leave by the end of the year.

Jakarta has been supporting paramilitary gangs which have

started raising the temperature in Timor. It is for this reason that a UN-sponsored peace-keeping force is being considered.

Besides Britain, there have been pledges of support from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the Nordic countries. Portugal has even promised to underwrite the entire operation if necessary.

The United States has yet to commit itself, although Stanley Roth, Assistant Secretary of State responsible for East Asia, is in close touch with Mr Ramos Horta and Mr Gusmao.

There are fears that a rapid end to the 22-year Indonesian occupation of East Timor would give way to chaos.

Mr Ramos Horta says he is working to shore up international support for a new independent state and to enlist a high-powered team of international economic advisers. The team will be chaired by Eric Hottung, a Hong Kong tycoon, and will include the financier George Soros.

'Clinton raped me in hotel,' claims Arkansas woman

HIGHLY DAMAGING allegations concerning President Bill Clinton's past finally appeared in America's mainstream media yesterday, after months in the shadowy realms of the Internet.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which pursued a fiercely anti-Clinton stance throughout the impeachment proceedings, devoted most of its editorial page on Friday to an Arkansas woman's graphic account of a sexual assault by Mr Clinton.

The article reports Juanita Broadrick's claims of her rape by Mr Clinton 20 years ago, when he was attorney general of Arkansas. According to Ms Broadrick, she was attending a conference in Little Rock

BY MARY DEJEVSKY
in Washington

Arkansas where he was speaking. They arranged to meet for coffee. He suggested that her room would be quieter than a noisy coffee shop, and she agreed. In her account, they were looking out of the window; he put his arm around her; propositioned her; forced her on to the bed and had sex with her.

He bruised and bit her lip, then suggested an ice-pack to reduce the swelling. Ms Broadrick says she was pained and shocked, but never brought charges because he was the state's chief law officer and had ambitions to be governor.

Ms Broadrick was one of the women summoned to testify in the sexual harassment suit brought against Mr Clinton by Paula Jones, but she signed an affidavit denying that the incident happened - an affidavit she has subsequently refuted.

She also denies rumours that her husband was paid not to divulge the story.

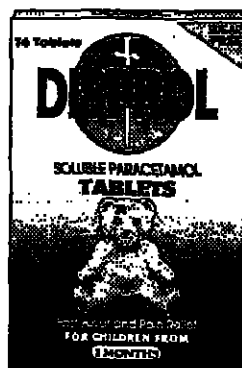
However, the similarities in approach, if not outcome, between Ms Jones' account and Ms Broadrick's, made Ms Broadrick's evidence highly relevant to that case.

Although there were rumours of the attack circulating around the time of Mr Clinton's first presidential campaign, Ms

Broadrick remained silent, until now. Last month, she was interviewed by NBC but the tape was kept under wraps - according to some because of White House pressure.

Clinton supporters maintain that the revival of Ms Broadrick's accusation is just one more aspect of the "right-wing" conspiracy against him: having failed on the impeachment front, they say, his enemies are looking for other ways of discrediting him.

But the extent to which Mr Clinton's past is bound up with contemporary politics, suggests that the truth may never be known - and would not change anything if it were.



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The last film tsar of all the Russias

AT LEAST 6,000 people will today gather in the Kremlin for the world premiere of a film that is not only the most expensive in Russian history, but which also sets out to work a miracle - to lift Russia out of its post-Soviet decline, bring back its émigrés, and reconcile its divisions.

It will be a gala occasion, a rare taste of Hollywood in the middle of a long winter, made bleaker than ever by an unshakeable economic depression. Memories of August's crash - which destroyed the emerging middle class and wiped out oligarchs - will be temporarily suspended, at least by the gilded few.

These are various. Those invited to view *The Barber of Siberia* include Alexei II, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church; Russia's ascendant Prime Minister, Yevgeny Primakov; the film director Steven Spielberg; and a long list of leading lights from politics, diplomacy, journalism and the arts. It was unclear last

BY PHIL REEVES
in Moscow

night if Boris Yeltsin will take up his invitation, but his wife, Naina, is expected.

The film cost \$45m (£28m), an unprecedented figure in the Russian movie industry. Most of it was raised in the West. It is the work of the actor-director Nikita Mikhalkov, who won an Oscar in 1995 for the classic *Burnt by the Sun*, but who won acclaim long before for movies including *Slave of Love* (1976) and *Oblomov* (1979). It stars Richard Harris and Julia Ormond, who are also expected at tonight's fur-wrapped parade of the great, the good, and not-so-good. The moustachioed Mikhalkov himself plays a cameo part, as Tsar Alexander III.

This is apt. These days, Mikhalkov, 53, is not only a giant of the Russian film industry and its chief international advocate. He is also a figure on the political landscape, tirelessly preaching what he brands as "enlightened



Julia Ormond with Alexei Petrenko in a scene from 'The Barber of Siberia', directed by Nikita Mikhalkov, above right

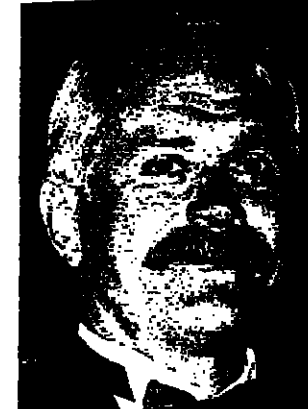
conservatism" - beliefs which include a constitutional monarchy, politics by "evolution not revolution", Russian Orthodoxy, and the urgent need to restore Russia's self-respect.

He recently revealed that he would "think seriously" about running for the presidency. No matter that his remarks looked suspiciously like a pre-launch publicity stunt, the Russian

press fell on them, eagerly factoring him into the endless national debate about Mr Yeltsin's successor.

But Mikhalkov is not waiting for any ballot. He has flirted

with the electorate before, winning a parliamentary seat in 1995 under the list system as a member of the government party Our Home is Russia. He turned it down, despite having



drums - could be on the up. Recovery has been painfully slow. The first major modern cinema complex did not open in Moscow until 1996. The country's 2,000 other urban cinemas are all too often dingy, pungent and empty. In 1996, only 20 films were released in Russia, a dismal level only previously matched in the last repressive years of Stalin. Last year, that figure rose to 46. It is, at least, progress.

Whether Mikhalkov ultimately succeeds in his aim of currying up the battered Slavic sense of pride is uncertain. It may not be as easy as he thinks. He is likely to be criticised for making too many concessions to the Western punter - much of the dialogue is in English. The film, an epic 19th-century love story, is said to have a marked Hollywood texture.

The whiff of Hollywood has also infused the hype, which has reached an unprecedented level for a Russian film. The Paris fashion house, Hermès, has produced *Barber of Siberia* silk scarves. A Russian perfume firm, Novaya Zarya, has released two Barber scents. Phone cards are going on sale, with Barber logos. There is a website. And after dining on pancakes, caviar, pies, vodka and champagne, the premiere guests will be able to loosen their belts and cummerbunds and smoke Barber cigars. Beverly Hills would love it. But will Russia?

"When I lost the war its movie-makers raised the country from ruins," Mikhalkov said this week. "People paid their last pennies to see films because they gave them hope and strength... I want the people who emigrated from Russia to see my film. I want them to return to raise the country up with their hearts, their labours and their minds."

Spoken like a patriot, a man who - as a genealogical chart on his office wall reportedly reveals - can trace his lineage to Catherine the Great. No surprise, then, that he will toast his film in the post-screening banquet with the words "To the Fatherland" to the music of Glinka's "To the Glory of the Tsar".

But tonight's event has another dimension, valued by this struggling society. It will be brandished as further evidence that Russia's once-mighty film industry - after years in the dol-



Kenneth Starr is sworn in before his testimony to the House Judiciary Committee last month

Starr may face 'special prosecutor'

THE MAN who was appointed as a special prosecutor to investigate US President Bill Clinton may himself become the target of a special prosecutor.

Kenneth Starr may be investigated for ethical breaches during his inquiry, which initially focused on the White-water affair but came to encompass much, much more.

The possibility of appointing a special prosecutor is one option being considered by Janet Reno, the Attorney-General. The New York Times reported yesterday.

He is alleged to have broken legal rules in the way his staff treated Monica Lewinsky, the former White House intern whose affair with President Clinton led to impeachment proceedings.

His office is alleged to have hidden links to lawyers working for Paula Jones, the Arkansas state employee who brought a sexual harassment suit against Mr Clinton. And his staff are alleged to have leaked to the press details of grand jury testimony.

Mr Starr, a former official in the Reagan White House and judicial appointee of the Bush administration, is regarded as part of the "vast right-wing conspiracy" by the Democrats loyal to Mr Clinton, and as a crusading hero by much of the right wing across the United States. The investigation into his affairs is being handled by a spe-

cial unit of the Justice Department at the moment, which has caused criticism from the right.

Ms Reno is, after all, an officer of Mr Clinton's cabinet, and she is considering appointing a special investigator - perhaps a senior Republican lawyer, to counter claims of bias - to complete the probe. The idea seems to have come from Mr Starr's office, as part of a "rancorous" exchange over the inquiry.

Washington is a town where the largest section in the yellow pages is for lawyers, and about half of the politicians and staff have a legal background.

So it perhaps should not be surprising that lawyers will investigate a lawyer for his links to other lawyers. But the importance of Mr Starr's continuing embroilment is threefold.

In the eyes of some Democrats, he overstepped the line repeatedly in his investigation. Republicans, meanwhile, think that the probe is part of a revenge strategy from the White House.

They are also convinced that the investigation is intended to deter Mr Starr from pressing indictments against Mr Clinton and perhaps other members of the President's entourage for their behaviour during the past year.

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Nigeria takes fateful step to democracy

BY ALEX DUVAL SMITH
in Lagos

PARLIAMENTARY elections today, organised to end 15 years of military rule in Nigeria, should provide a clear indication of who will win the race to become president in a week's time.

Both presidential candidates, the retired general and former head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, and the one-time finance minister, Olu Falae, are seen as acceptable to the country's ever-powerful military. They have pledged that there will be no "witch-hunts" against the top brass who have de-factored the state.

Their parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and a joint challenge by the All People's Party (APP) and Mr Falae's Alliance for Democracy (AD) are ranged along tribal, religious and regional lines. It is the very scenario which the military has always used to justify its hold on power for all but 10 years of Nigeria's 39 years of independence.

Pini Jason, a political commentator, said: "The reason the official handover from military to civilian rule is happening on 29 May - three months after the last of the elections - is so that the military can sit down with the winners and work out how Nigeria will be run."

Even though the candidates for today's Senate, House of Representatives and National Assembly elections are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds - including top brass swapping "uniforms for agbada" (traditional dress) - their tribal affiliations are foremost in the minds of the country's 108 million people.

The AD is seen as firmly



Obasanjo: Acceptable candidate for military

Yoruba - the tribe which dominates the south-west, including the economic capital, Lagos, with its population of between 6 and 9 million.

The Yorubas typically see themselves as disadvantaged in the face of domination by Hausa-Fulani and other tribes in the north of the country. Ever since Britain, through indirect rule, elevated the position of traditional leaders in the Muslim north, they have dominated in the powerful military.

To consolidate his position, 60-year-old Mr Falae, a Yoruba who was finance minister in the 1980s under the still-powerful General Ibrahim Babangida, has chosen a running-mate from the north, Umaru Shinkafi.

Amid bitter in-fighting, Mr Shinkafi was chosen at the expense of the APP's proposed presidential candidate, Oghoanya Omu. The departure of Dr Omu, a former governor of Abia state in the east, could cost Mr Falae crucial votes in the east when the presidential election takes place next Saturday.

In today's parliamentary elections - the results of which are not expected at least until Monday - the APP could do well in the east. The AD is expected to sweep Lagos and the south-west.

General Obasanjo, a 61-year-old Yoruba, and his PDP will not do well in the south-west where he is considered a traitor.

The act for which he is respected internationally - that he, as military dictator in 1979 handed over to a civilian president - is regarded in Yorubaland as a sell-out to the military because the man he selected was Shehu Shagari, a Hausa-Fulani.

But General Obasanjo, who has revealed himself as extremely well-funded, allegedly by military allies, will get strong support from the north, consolidated by his Hausa running mate, Abubakar Rimi.

General Obasanjo and the PDP will lose out in the east because of his role as a Marine commander during Nigeria's civil war, between 1967 and 1970, when the region declared



Young market vendors near a tattered election poster for the presidential hopeful Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired general (Correspondent's photo)

itself the Independent Republic of Biafra.

A nation whose patience has been severely tested by the military because fuel shortages dominate everyday life in a country that is the world's fifth oil exporter, Nigeria seems

nevertheless willing to await change patiently.

Abdul Oroh, director of the Civil Liberties Organisation and at the forefront of monitoring elections with dozens of foreign observers from the United States and the

European Union, said Nigerians were not expecting miracles.

"The presidential candidates have been chosen by questionable means, in fact a lot of money changed hands at the primaries. But we are confident that the voting procedure will be as fair as it can be," he said.

"There were problems with registration, way back in October and the constituencies are very inequitably drawn, to favour the north. Nevertheless, we are seeing the beginning of a democratic process. The military knows that dictatorships are unfashionable. Even with these elections, we are far from being a democracy. But this is a start," Mr Oroh added.

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IN BRIEF

Ethiopia snubs EU peace envoys

THE ETHIOPIAN government gave a cool reception yesterday to a European Union delegation attempting to broker a peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea, refusing a meeting with the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi. Envoys eventually met the Foreign Minister, Seyoum Mesfin.

Poles say Ted Turner was racist

THE POLISH government yesterday asked the American media magnate, Ted Turner, to apologise for a remark about Poles it described as racist. It said Mr Turner had to apologise within a week or it would withdraw \$200,000 of support for a special Time magazine edition on Poland.

Kabbah sees progress on peace

PRESIDENT AHMAD Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone said yesterday he felt progress had been made towards an end to civil war, but rebels expressed concern at his lack of movement. Sankoh, leader of the Revolutionary United Front, is in jail in Freetown facing execution for treason.

Minsk leader criticises 'pettiness'

BELARUS PRESIDENT Aleksandr Lukashenko denounced European ambassadors yesterday for their demands for compensation for eviction from their homes. "How dare such great powers bring claims of a message hundred or so dollars against a country that suffered from Chernobyl?" he said.

Bodies found in doctor's flat

A DOCTOR in Kazakhstan has been charged with murder after police found the mummified bodies of four of her relatives in her apartment. The doctor told police that she did not have the money to bury her mother and three sisters, who died of an unspecified disease last summer.

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BRIEFING

Carter to leave CBI at year

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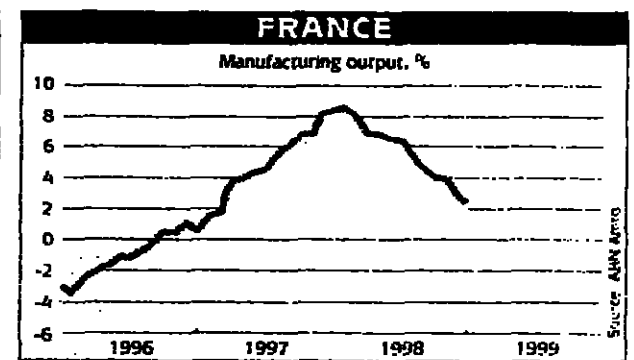
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TOURIST RATES

BUSINESS

Slowdown in France and Germany raises G7 stakes

BY DIANE COYLE AND ANDREW GARFIELD



ALARMING SIGNS of weakness in Europe's two biggest economies have raised the stakes at today's Group of Seven meeting in Bonn. Wim Duisenberg, president of the European Central Bank, will come under fresh pressure to avert the danger of recession by cutting Euroland interest rates. Figures yesterday showed a shock fall in German gross domestic product at the end of 1998, the first fall in national output for three years. Separately, business confidence in Germany continued to deteriorate in January, the eighth successive month of decline. In addition, manufacturing output in France fell sharply in December rather than rebounding as expected. Analysts said the disappointing news had improved the chance that the ECB would cut rates in March. In the eyes of the financial markets, it is the weakness of the euro since its launch 50 days ago that explains the European Central Bank's

reluctance so far to reduce borrowing costs. "These figures explain Oskar Lafontaine's pressure on the ECB," said Mark Cliffe, European economist at ING Barings. But he added that the high-profile campaign for rate cuts by the German finance minister had probably been counter-productive. However, today's G7 meeting will be the first time that Mr Duisenberg will have had to face all his critics. Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will

today back calls from US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin for the Europeans to cut interest rates to boost demand. Mr Rubin said earlier in the week that the disparities in growth between the United States and its main trading partners was leading to an unsustainable situation. The Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, will point to the speed with which the UK has cut interest rates. Treasury officials said yesterday that all countries needed

to play their part. "We do want demand-led growth across the world to ensure that the burden of absorbing exports from crisis economies is evenly shared." Yesterday's figures showed that German GDP fell by 0.4 per cent in the final quarter of 1998, taking GDP growth for the year as a whole to 2.6 per cent from the previous year's 2.3 per cent. A sharp fall in exports, down 3.4 per cent in the quarter, accounted for much of the weakness, but investment and government spending also declined.

The latest index of the business climate in Germany from Ifo, the economic research institute, declined to 91.1 in January from 91.4 in December, while the expectations index fell to 96.1 from 96.5. The continuing fall came as a big disappointment as the closely scrutinised indicator had been expected to stabilise. In France, manufacturing output fell 0.7 per cent in December after a 0.1 per cent drop in November. The year-on-year growth in production slowed markedly to just 1.2 per cent.

Don Smith, an economist at HSBC Securities, said: "This signals that an underlying deterioration in French industrial activity is now taking hold." At today's meeting, the Chancellor is expected broadly to support proposals from Hans Tietmeyer, the Bundesbank President, for a new liaison committee linking central bank governments which could act as an early warning system to ensure that potential problems in the world economy and financial system are spotted early. Mr Tietmeyer has stepped short of calling for a new international body and is proposing instead a new forum with a small secretariat, which would co-ordinate the work of existing regulatory bodies and central banks around the world. The Chancellor is particularly keen that the various codes of practice on transparency and standards of compliance and prudential supervision being drafted in response to the Asian and Russian crises are implemented rapidly.

BRIEFING

Turner to leave CBI at year-end

ADAM TURNER, the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, is to resign at the end of 1998, six months before his term at the head of the business lobby group was scheduled to end. The CBI denied that Mr Turner was resigning due to tensions with Clive Thompson, the organisation's president.

A CBI spokeswoman said Mr Turner had achieved most of the things he wanted to and was resigning in order to write a book and spend more time with his young children. Mr Turner was appointed to a five-year term as CBI head in September 1995.

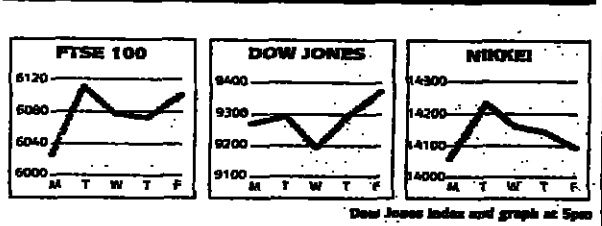
Sidlaw agrees £106m Danisco bid

SHARES IN Sidlaw jumped 14p to 152.5p yesterday after the Scottish-based flexible packaging company announced an agreed £106.4m cash offer from Danish foods and packaging group Danisco. The offer values the Scottish food packaging company at 155p a share - 38.5 per cent higher than its value before the talks were announced. The bid for Sidlaw follows a wave of consolidation in the packaging sector. No redundancies are expected from Sidlaw's 1,000-strong workforce.

RAC welcomes High Court victory

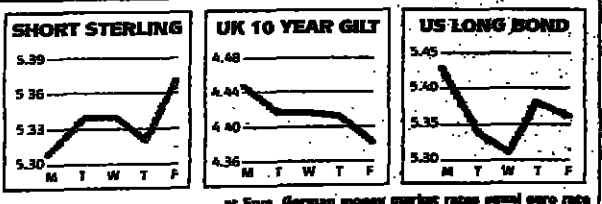
THE Royal Automobile Club (RAC) yesterday welcomed a High Court ruling allowing its 12,000 full members to pocket windfall payments from its planned flotation or possible sale. Neil Johnson, chief executive, said: "We look forward to getting on with the process of a flotation or sale of the company in the best interests of our shareholders." Overseas members, former members and those whose membership applications were not received by the time the RAC agreed to a bid from US firm Cendant last March - which collapsed under antitrust pressures last month - were all excluded from a potential £396m payout. The 6 million "associate" members, who pay around £80 a year for breakdown cover, were also ruled ineligible.

STOCK MARKETS



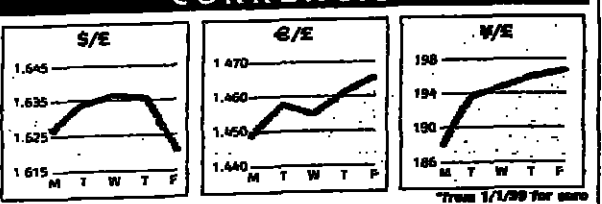
Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Vol
FTSE 100	6031.20	-43.70	-0.72	6195.60	4599.20	2.65
FTSE 250	5173.10	-19.20	-0.37	5970.80	4247.60	3.24
FTSE 350	2859.30	-15.90	-0.55	2968.10	2210.40	2.74
FTSE All Share	2164.70	-14.47	-0.67	2384.50	1743.53	2.78
American Cap	3248.10	-2.70	-0.08	3288.80	1834.40	3.60
FTSE 100	1227.90	-1.20	-0.10	1517.10	1046.20	4.41
FTSE 100	620.40	0.90	0.11	1146.50	761.30	1.16
FTSE 100	2766.05	-16.65	-0.61	3079.21	2018.15	2.14
FTSE 100	1204.50	-5.95	-0.50	1332.07	880.69	2.02
Dow Jones	9373.27	-73.58	-0.79	9647.99	7400.30	1.66
Nikkei	14098.06	-48.75	-0.35	17352.55	12767.90	1.93
Yoko Seng	9258.12	-168.27	-1.83	11926.15	6244.79	3.73
Dax	4802.38	-42.70	-0.89	5217.83	3833.71	1.78
S&P 500	1245.44	-8.06	-0.65	1283.64	923.32	1.27
Nasdaq	2288.60	-28.05	-1.24	2533.44	1857.09	0.29
Toronto 300	6405.10	-21.03	-0.33	7857.79	3320.90	1.66
Brazil Ibovespa	8945.15	-84.67	-0.95	12339.14	4575.69	6.93
Belgium BEL20	3415.80	-24.02	-0.70	3713.21	2659.71	2.08
Australian All	5172.63	-3.44	-0.07	5906.65	3955.38	1.90
France CAC 40	4130.48	-91.07	-2.26	4404.94	2881.21	1.96
Milan MIB30	34226.00	-643.00	-1.91	39170.00	24175.00	1.19
Madrid IBS35	9640.90	-82.20	-0.84	10989.80	6889.90	1.90
Irish Allshare	5239.53	-48.56	-0.94	5981.70	3732.57	1.50
S Korea KOSPI	522.18	-14.23	-2.85	651.99	277.37	0.08
Australia ASX	2924.30	-41.80	-1.43	2944.70	2394.70	3.15

INTEREST RATES



Index	3 month	6 month	1 year	2 year	3 year	5 year	10 year	15 year	30 year
UK	5.44	-2.13	5.29	-2.27	-4.39	-1.56	4.38	-1.58	-1.58
US	5.00	-0.63	5.25	-0.41	5.06	0.45	5.37	0.48	0.48
Japan	0.28	-0.58	0.30	-0.52	1.87	-0.04	2.97	0.45	0.45
Germany	3.08	-0.43	3.03	-0.72	3.90	-1.05	4.83	-0.70	-0.70

CURRENCIES



Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Vol
Dollar	1.6230	-0.12	-7.39	1.6369	1.4079	0.6109
Euro	1.4647	+0.02	1.4079	1.4679	1.2581	0.8575
Yen	195.19	+0.22	0.11	206.08	175.91	125.91
E Index	101.30	0.00	0.00	104.80	98.70	108.70

OTHER INDICATORS

Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Vol
Brent Oil (\$)	10.11	-0.18	-1.72	10.37	9.57	139.57
Gold (\$)	287.65	1.45	0.50	288.85	275.00	139.57
Silver (\$)	5.60	0.15	2.73	5.68	5.25	139.57

TOURIST RATES

Country	Rate	Country	Rate
Australia (\$)	2.4631	Mexican (nuevo peso)	14.72
Austria (schillings)	13.47	Netherlands (guilders)	3.1212
Belgium (francs)	57.25	New Zealand (\$)	2.6906
Canada (\$)	2.3572	Norway (kroner)	12.36
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8185	Portugal (escudos)	282.77
Denmark (kroner)	10.60	Saudi Arabia (rials)	5.9510
Finland (markka)	8.4952	Singapore (\$)	2.6617
France (francs)	9.3049	South Africa (rand)	9.7846
Germany (marks)	2.7831	Spain (pesetas)	235.83
Greece (drachma)	457.47	Sweden (kronor)	12.69
Hong Kong (\$)	12.21	Switzerland (francs)	2.2746
Ireland (pounds)	1.1146	Thailand (bahts)	56.19
India (rupees)	62.20	Turkey (liras)	541.532
Israel (shekels)	6.1341	USA (\$)	1.5868
Italy (lire)	2752		
Japan (yen)	191.78		
Malaysia (ringgits)	5.9342		
Malta (lira)	0.6109		

City marks Abbey down by 7%

BY LEA PATERSON

ABBEY NATIONAL saw its shares tumble 7 per cent yesterday, despite announcing a solid set of earnings. Analysts were disappointed by the absence of special shareholder payouts and increased bad debt provisions. The former building society, which reported a 19 per cent rise in 1998 pre-tax profits to £1.5bn, said it would retain capital in its business rather than follow the example of rivals such as Halifax and return surplus cash to shareholders.

Ian Harley, Abbey chief executive, said he would consider giving capital back to shareholders only if the money could not be used efficiently elsewhere and if at least £500m could be returned over an 18-month period. Analysts were disappointed the bank decided against awarding a special dividend, and Abbey shares ended the day down 65p at 1.251p.

"There was nothing in the results that was extra to expectations," said Hugh Pye, banking analyst at Robert Fleming Securities. Mr Harley said the fall in the share price partly reflected the sharp increases recorded prior to yesterday's results. He said: "I don't think there's anything we've said today that would justify that fall in price, but the market is fickle." Abbey shares dragged down the rest of the banking sector and the FTSE 100, which closed down 43.7 points at 6,031.2.



Taking shelter: Abbey chief executive Ian Harley (left) and chairman Lord Tugendhat yesterday. Edward Webb

Several analysts were concerned about Abbey's bad debt provisions, up by £80m to £201m. Abbey said the increase partly reflected the exceptionally low levels of bad debt seen in 1997 and that, going forward, it did not expect any substantial increase in arrears. Mr Harley indicated that the bank's preference would be to

acquire a smaller life insurer or asset manager than to link up with a major European or UK rival. He said: "It's difficult to justify cross-border mergers. Quite what value would be added is hard to see." Lord Tugendhat, Abbey's chairman, said: "I'm sure we will make further acquisitions but they have to add value

and fit in with our strategy." Abbey's share of net mortgage lending rose from 3.3 per cent to 5.9 per cent, although the chief executive said he would not be unduly concerned if its mortgage market share failed to rise further in 1999. Mr Harley added that Abbey borrowers should not automatically expect further falls in

base rates to be translated into lower mortgage rates, saying the bank had to consider its savers. "Savers will become a greater issue as rates fall." Costs for year 2000 compliance and euro preparation grew by £40m to £68m. The dividend increased by 15 per cent to 35.3p per share. Outlook, page 21

PetsMart bosses may turn tables on rivals

BY NIGEL COPE Associate City Editor

THE MANAGEMENT of the PetsMart retail chain, which is looking to buy the business back from its American parent, may turn the tables on its rival in the bid battle and bid for that company's loss. Giles Clarke, chief executive of PetsMart in the UK, is bending against rival chain Pets At Home to win back control of the business he sold to the Americans for £150m two years ago. Now it is understood he may also seek to win control of Pets At Home if his offer for the former Pet City business succeeds.

While there is room in the market for two out-of-town pet retailers, experts believe there would be significant cost savings if the two were merged. The stumbling block would be that Pets At Home is a family-controlled business that is unlikely to want to sell. It is run by Anthony Preston, who founded the company in 1991. However, the venture capital group 3i has a 20 per cent stake and may be seeking an exit after a stock market flotation of the business was postponed last year.

Pets At Home and the management of PetsMart UK are thought to be offering £10m to £15m for the retail group, which has struggled since the Americans took control. Some venture capitalists think it may be worth as little as £8m. The Americans are thought keen to sell and may tie in an announcement with its full-year results next Tuesday. It is expected to report full-year profits of £21.7m (£13m) on sales of £2.1bn. There may be problems with the competition authorities if Pets At Home and PetsMart link. They would control about 60 per cent of Britain's pet products market and 40 per cent of pet sales. Small, independent shops would be sure to complain.

Car chief warns on staying out of euro

BY BARRIE CLEMENT AND COLIN BROWN

THE GOVERNMENT was warned yesterday that Britain's position outside the euro would deter investment by multinational companies and could cost a million jobs in manufacturing. Nick Reilly, chief executive of Vauxhall Motors, said that companies like his would view the UK's decision to remain outside the single currency as a negative factor when deciding where to invest. And Ken Jackson, leader of

the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, warned that the massive jobs hemorrhage could be much worse if the effect on employment in the financial sector was taken into account. On the other side of the argument, Business for Sterling, the anti-euro campaign led by Lord Marsh, yesterday wrote to

Tony Blair protesting that it was "unreasonable to expect business to spend billions of pounds preparing for the single currency when the Government's own economic tests for joining have clearly not been met". Pro-euro Labour MPs are lining up to welcome the Treasury change-over plan for the euro, due next week, in spite of its failure to give a clear commitment that Britain will enter the European single currency.

The plan will make it clear that it could take up to two years after a "yes" vote in a referendum before Britain could enter the euro. Downing Street sources have said the referendum will be delayed until after the next election, making 2003 the most likely entry year. Speaking at a conference on Europe organised by the AEEU, Mr Reilly said that remaining outside the single currency would cost his company £10m a

year. He pointed out that it was now possible to buy a Vauxhall car in Britain by paying in euros, although the company would still be burdened by having to deal in two currencies. He described the situation as a "mess". "The UK is an integral part of the European Union. We can't pick and choose which suits us and which doesn't," he told the video-conferencing session between the AEEU and German union IG Metall.

AROUND THE WORLD'S MARKETS

LONDON

BLUE CHIPS spent most of the day in the red, although Footsie closed above its worst, down 43.7 points at 6,031.2. Supporting shares made modest headway. Abbey National unsettled with disappointing figures and a 66 per cent rise in provisions. The shares were once down 108p; they closed 85p lower at 1.251p. Supermarkets were ruffled by price cutting, with J Sainsbury off 11.5p to 366.25p and Safeway 9.25p to 272.5p. Tesco, the price cutter, rose 1.5p to 175.5p. Derek Pain, page 21

NEW YORK

US STOCKS were higher at midday in quiet trade following a rebound in technology stocks. The Dow Jones average was up 74 points, or 0.8 per cent, at 9,372. The Nasdaq was 28 points higher at 2,288. Wall Street was braced for volatility on expiration of options and options on futures. Mark Loftis, senior vice-president at Everen Securities said: "It's mostly a tech-led rebound. There is some value out there."

TOKYO

STOCKS recorded their third successive day of losses, with the Nikkei 225 finishing 48.75 points lower at 14,098.04. Traders said investors were concerned that the unwinding of corporate cross-shareholdings ahead of the fiscal year-end would spark volatility. "Unwinding of cross-holdings is preventing the index from running ahead," said Celia Farron, a vice-president at Nomura Securities. The yen fell further against the dollar in Tokyo trading, boosting the shares of export companies.

HONG KONG

HONG KONG shares tumbled in the first session after the three-day Chinese New Year break. The Hang Seng index reversed early gains, finishing 148.27 points - 1.58 per cent - lower at 9,254.12. Traders said lower Hang Seng futures, firmer interest rates and fears over bad debts at Hang Seng Bank took shares lower. Shares in Hang Seng Bank - which has significant exposure to both China and Hong Kong - fell 5.2 per cent.

SAO PAULO

BRAZILIAN shares shrugged off news that the economy had slipped into recession, trading up 107.25 points, or 1.31 per cent, by mid-afternoon at 8,967.93. Gross domestic product fell by a seasonally adjusted 1.64 per cent in the fourth quarter, the second successive quarterly drop. The national statistics institute said: "At the end of the year, the objective of the government centred on balancing the public accounts, putting off growth... for a more stable climate."

Debt relief package has to be improved

THE REALLY big question facing the world's leading finance ministers and central bankers as they assemble this weekend in Bonn is not Wall Street or the weakness of the Japanese economy. Rather, it is how to re-connect the advanced economies with the developing world. The upheaval in global capital markets since mid-1997 has resulted in a virtual halt to the flow of investment from rich to developing countries and a total cessation of inflows to the world's most disadvantaged nations. The well-stream of globalisation has dried up.

This is the issue that the Tietmeyer plan for better co-ordination between banking regulators is ultimately meant to address. The proposals drawn up by the Bundesbank president from the G7's repair job on the global financial architecture. But getting the structure right can in the end only be a long-term goal. A more immediate fix is required. On this front, debt relief seems to be the most urgent priority. The burden of debt hanging over the poorest developing economies is so great that they will never have any hope of joining the global club unless it is



OUTLOOK

lightened. This is much more than just a moral issue, though it is certainly that. For its continuing economic success and political credibility, the global club needs to be all encompassing. So, although it would be easy to play the cynic and mock Gordon Brown for leaping on the bandwagon set rolling by pop stars like Bono and Bowie, this would be a cheap response. For one thing Mr Brown, like his predecessor, Kenneth Clarke, has taken the lead within the G7 on improving debt relief. In truth, it is the ageing rockers, not the politicians,

who are leaping aboard the bandwagon.

More important, there is a genuine need to improve the terms of the debt relief package so painfully negotiated between the G7, IMF and World Bank in the past few years. The lives, health and education of many millions depend on it. So does the ideal of an open and prosperous world economy which can deliver the benefits of market capitalism to all. That ideal has taken a serious knock of late, and it is in urgent need of a pick-me-up.

On the other hand, the debt relief campaigners do need to be steered away from the moral high ground to the less ambitious plains of practical politics. Many are calling for the entire \$300bn-plus Third World debt to be written off.

This will not happen, nor should it - it would penalise desperately poor countries like Bangladesh that have never taken on big debts because they are unable to. The end result is that it would divert much-needed aid money away from such countries, while giving an unfair advantage to those on the next rung of the development ladder that have managed to

borrow money in the past. The increasingly glamorous Jubilee 2000 campaign should reward Mr Brown's gesture by steering its star supporters towards a realistic target.

Defence buying

THE LOBBYING and razzmatazz is already under way. Even at this early stage, political allies are being mustered and the winning and dithering is at fever pitch. The prize is this summer's £750m order for a new generation of air to air missiles - the largest British defence order of the year.

There are just two bidders - a consortium of Matra, British Aerospace and GEC Marconi, and the US defence group Raytheon, together with a number of European, subcontracted partners. Like a lot of these defence orders, the contest therefore becomes one between a bought-in US technology that already essentially exists, and a yet-to-be-developed independent European one.

Raytheon has an existing and highly effective medium-range air-to-air missile, which is already in use

on Tornado and Harrier jets. It would be a relatively cheap and simple exercise to upgrade this to the "beyond visual range" missile that the Ministry of Defence wants for the Eurofighter. Against this, Matra and British Aerospace are proposing to develop an entirely new missile, which while more expensive and high risk, would be bigger and better.

The debate about which supplier to opt for is very similar to that which revolved around the Eurofighter itself. Do we want our own, customised technology, which is unobtainable to the US and might result in all kinds of weird and wonderful spin-offs, or do we just buy it off the shelf and spend the difference on something else? The argument is too long-winded and varied to rehearse in any depth here, but it does seem that for a change, the US bid might be in with a chance.

The Eurofighter has come in hugely over-budget and over-time. That in itself has probably ensured that it is the last great project of its type that will be entirely independently developed. Assuming the world's present geo-political set-up

doesn't change out of all recognition, the next generation of fighter aircraft will almost certainly be a joint US-European enterprise. The case for starting now and creating a missile technology that is global in scope and nature would seem a strong one.

Abbey National

IAN HARLEY, Abbey National's sober and rather sensible chief executive, has every right to feel a little miffed with the stock market today. He delivers a perfectly respectable set of full-year results - profits up by almost one fifth despite the deteriorating economic environment - and his shares tumble.

The main gripe of the City, it seems, is that Abbey failed to come out with the same sort of headline-grabbing party-bag of goodies that has characterised its rivals' result presentations.

Halifax, for example, has decided to hand back £1.5bn to its shareholders. The Woolwich came up with plans for both a special dividend payment and a tie-up with a US home

loan provider. Barclays has outdone everyone so far, shelling out millions for a brand new chief executive. Boring old Abbey, analysts say, couldn't even muster up a new mortgage slogan or two.

The market's reaction to Abbey's results is unfair. The main justification for the demutualisation of Britain's building societies was that the extra capital they could raise would allow them to do all sorts of exciting things to ensure long-term success. Simply sitting on the extra cash for a year or two before handing it straight back to shareholders doesn't say much for either the management's imagination or the company's prospects.

Perhaps the most telling thing about this year's series of banking gimmicks is that their impact on share prices is already starting to fade. Barclays has made the best fist so far of hanging onto its post result share price rises, and hopes that the appointment of Michael O'Neill will generate structural change as well as newspaper column inches. The others have fared less well. So who knows, perhaps the reverse will be true of Abbey.

Tesco puts skids under Sainsbury

J SAINSBURY, the once high-flying supermarket chain, fell to its lowest for 18 months, with investors increasingly anxious about its trading performance as rival Tesco declares a price war. The shares dropped by 11.5p (after 20.25p) to 386.25p in heavy trading. Last autumn they hit 580p. Tesco said it was making "significant reductions in hundreds of prices across the board in both branded and unbranded goods".

Tesco edged ahead 1.5p to 175.5p but Sainsbury, down 9.25p to 272.5p, and Somerfield, 11.5p to 358p, were other casualties. Asda fell 1.5p to 159p.

There was speculation in the market that Tesco's price move was not unconnected with the long-awaited Office of Fair Trading report into supermarket profits, which could appear in the next week or so.

As if attempting to deflect such criticism, Tesco said: "This is planned, budgeted for and it in no way affects [profit] forecasts." Tesco's year ends this month; it is expected to make profits of around £270m.

Sainsbury shares were al-

ready under pressure before the Tesco price initiative was known. Almost certainly the rest of the supermarket pack will be obliged to follow and the market fears profits will be hit.

Earlier this month Sainsbury produced a disappointing trading statement that showed that the John Cleese "Value to shout about" campaign had flopped. In the 19 weeks to the end of January like-for-like sales grew by a miserable 1.2 per cent and, it was admitted, the Cleese campaign had eroded profit margins. An AGB Research survey this week indicated that most supermarkets, including Sainsbury, were feeling the pinch.

The Sainsbury statement was regarded as a profits warning. The market now expects year's figures to emerge at around £760m, compared with £719m last time and £809m in 1995.

After a taken opening gain, Footsie spent the session in the

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

red, ending 43.7 points lower at 6,031.2. The mid cap and small cap indices edged ahead.

Abbey National ruffled sentiment with a decidedly pedestrian profits performance. Coming after encouraging displays from Lloyds TSB, Barclays, Woolwich and Halifax, the Abbey announcement was a nasty surprise. Abbey led the Footsie fallers, plunging 85p (after 108p) to 1,251p with turnover put at nearly 7 million shares.

Centrica, after Thursday's strong run, fell 2.25p to 119.5p as Merrill Lynch placed 14 million shares at 120p.

British Aerospace suffered another uncomfortable ride as the market continued to fret about the Al-Yamamah oil-for-arms contracts with Saudi Arabia. The shares fell 10p to 409p, their lowest since November. The British and Saudi governments as well as BAE have denied reports that the contracts, agreed in 1985, are to be frozen on a care and maintenance basis.

BSkyB, the satellite broadcaster, rose 9.75p to 503.5p after Salomon Smith Barney produced an upbeat circular, suggesting the price should be around 550p.

On the takeover front Siflaw, a packaging group, jumped 14.5p to 152.5p after the group agreed a 155p cash offer from Danisco of Denmark.

English & Overseas Properties rose 18.5p to 79p after disclosing a bid approach and Reunion Mining added 8p to 44.5p.

Arcolelectric, a switches and neon signs group, was another offering profits caution, falling 6p to 44.5p. Jacobs, the shipping group, sunk 4p to 42p, a near four-year low, ahead of figures. Last year the shares were 56p.

Mondas, the software house, hardened 11p to 86.5p after winning two contracts worth around £300,000.

DBS Management, the finance group, rose a further 13.5p to 143.5p following its removal from the pensions mis-selling list.

SEAQ VOLUME: 1.02 billion

SEAQ TRADES: 86,435

GILTS INDEX: n/a

82.5p as talks began with possible bidders for all or part of the business.

LIBERfabric, a small company to be attracted by the possibility of a management buyout. But the printer overshadowed the buyout talks with what amounted to a profits warning.

Elsewhere the rumour mill remained active. David S Smith, the packaging group, was again heavily traded, gaining 6.5p to 113.5p and Relyon, a beds to security group, jumped 55.5p to 350p on persistent speculative interest.

Computer groups Misy and Sema made headway on hopes that they will next month claim Footsie membership. Misy, with the help of a US investment presentation, gained 27.5p to 640p and Sema 36p to 716p.

Greenalls, the hotels and pubs chain, managed a 23p gain to 380p despite a downbeat trading statement. Whitbread is rumoured to be stalking the former brewer, which has experienced tough times. At one time Greenalls was off 13.5p.

Vaux, where the ubiquitous

MMI, an Irish stockbroker, is in liquidation. It has outstanding positions in a number of shares, including Dana Petroleum, which will be cleared by the liquidator.

K&H London's remaining options broker, put MMI into liquidation. It is thought to be owed more than £1m, but principal Philip Kitchener could not provide an estimate. Dana held at 6.25p.

Whitbread is also seen as a potential bidder, rose 12.5p to 293.5p.

Brewer Tom Hoskins rolled out a profits warning and fell 5p, partially recovering towards the close to 14.5p, off 3.5p.

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£770m loss at NEC stuns world markets

NEC, THE Japanese computer and telecoms giant, stunned the world's markets yesterday when it reported its biggest-ever loss and announced plans to axe 15,000 jobs and remove its top executive. The company revealed that a dismal second half of the year would plunge it into a £770m (£770m) loss in 1998.

NEC blamed the slump on tough trading in its core sectors of telecoms, computers and semiconductors and promised a sweeping restructuring. More than 10 per cent of the 145,000 world workforce will lose their jobs in the next three years, with around 6,000 redundancies in overseas operations.

BY FRANCESCO GUERRERA

NEC employs around 2,700 people in the UK at plants in Telford near Birmingham, Livingston in Scotland, and offices in London and Milton Keynes. A spokesman yesterday said that it was "too early" to say whether UK staff would go.

The president, Hisashi Kaneko, was the first casualty of the overhaul. He is to resign at the end of next month and will be replaced by the executive vice-president, Koji Nishigaki. Mr Kaneko said the company was looking at the disposal of non-core operations in a bid to slash 600bn yen from its interest

payments. He claimed the changes would help NEC weather the difficult trading and return to profits.

"With our restructuring efforts and the reshuffling of top management we hope to create a revitalised NEC," he said.

During 1998, sales in NEC's three major businesses had been savaged by increasing competition, the economic crisis in emerging markets and the strength of the yen, the company said. "NEC's business environment has proved severe due to the delayed Japanese economic recovery, depressed demand resulting from the economic crisis in Asia as well

as Central and South America, and a rapid rise in the value of the yen."

The losses were compounded by 30bn yen lost on bond trading and a 75bn yen charge for the restructuring of Packard-Bell NEC, the group's US personal computer subsidiary. The Japanese group last year slashed the unit's workforce by half to 3,000 and reduced the number of PC models in a bid to fight increasing competition from low-cost makers such as Compaq and Dell. NEC also announced it would buy Packard-Bell operations in Europe for \$450m and bring them directly under Tokyo's control.



Lord Daresbury, Greenalls group managing director (left), with chairman Andrew Thomas

Greenalls back in takeover spotlight

GREENALLS, the pubs and hotels group, was back in the takeover spotlight yesterday after it issued a downbeat trading statement. Shares in the company rose 23p to 380p as the market anticipated a bid.

Whitbread and Bass have been linked with a possible £1.2bn takeover of Greenalls, with its De Vere hotels chain seen as the most attractive asset. "Some sort of bid will definitely materialise soon, and that's driving the share price up," one sector analyst said.

John Beaumont of Merrill Lynch said: "There is nothing in this statement that improves the underlying fundamentals of the business. It will simply hasten the chances of someone making a bid."

A spokeswoman for Greenalls declined to comment on "market speculation".

Analysts have cut profit forecasts as a result, with Nigel Popham at Teather & Greenwood reducing his full-year figure of £142m by £5m to £7m.

At the annual meeting yesterday, Greenalls' chairman An-

draw Thomas said a poor performance in the pubs division had pushed four-month sales below expectations. Total sales in the period rose by 2.5 per cent but sales in the group's pubs and restaurants fell by 4.6 per cent.

"Trading in pubs and restaurants has remained difficult and is below both last year and our expectations for the current year," said Mr Thomas. However, the group said pub trading in the past three weeks had shown a slight improvement "so we may see things turn".

The hotels division has per-

formed better, with room yields rising. The De Vere chain saw room yields rise by 2.1 per cent, with the Village Leisure chain the top performer with yields up by over 10 per cent.

Greenalls said the recent sale of its tenanted pub estate would lead to £5m of annual savings after a planned reorganisation. But, shorn of its brewing and tenanted pubs, analysts see the rump of managed pubs and hotels as a prime takeover target. "It is in the middle ground and just too small in this market," one said.

Management, the hedge fund. Following the sale, the two companies will end the alliance which was set up in 1995 when UBS bought the stake, with Swiss Life buying out the bank's 50 per cent share in their insurance joint venture.

The Swiss Life chief executive, Manfred Zobl, will leave the UBS board.

IN BRIEF

US trade deficit soars to \$169bn

THE US trade deficit soared to a record \$168.59bn (£103bn) in 1998 from \$110.21bn the previous year, even though it fell to \$13.8bn in December due to an unexpected \$2bn drop in imports. The previous record was \$153.3bn in 1987 - the year of the October stock market crash, thought to have been triggered by the growing reluctance of foreign investors to buy US assets on the scale required by the balance of payments gap.

Robert Shapiro, undersecretary at the US Commerce Department, said the trade gap was likely to swell further in 1999, with the US currently the only engine of growth in the world economy.

Alders warning

ALLDERS, the Croydon-based retail group, yesterday warned shareholders that it had seen no sustained improvement over the past few weeks since it announced a heavy fall in like-for-like sales. But chairman John Pattison told the annual meeting that the company's decision to extend the winter sale for a week had proved successful. The shares closed down 5p at 97p.

Burford sells

BURFORD HOLDINGS, the property group, has raised £22m with the sale of a 75 per cent stake in its North London retail and leisure park OS to a property investment fund managed by Marylebone Warwick Balfour. The sale valued the recently completed development at £22m, reflecting a profit on the cost of £20m, Burford said yesterday.

Railtrack signs

RAILTRACK announced that it had signed agreements with London & Continental Railways, Union Railways and the Government, securing the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Approach to EOP

SHARES IN English & Overseas Properties soared by 18.5p to 79p after the property company revealed it had received a takeover approach. The news of the approach comes a day after the group reported a 4 per cent increase in net asset value to 104.5p.

Games on

EIDOS, the computer games group behind Lara Croft and the Tomb Raider series, has agreed to publish three products from Elixir Studios, a London-based group founded by Demis Hassabis, who was co-creator of his first computer game Theme Park when he was 16 years old. Eidos shares rose 26p to 1.330p.

UDM defers

RJB MINING said it had received notification from the Union of Democratic Mineworkers that the UDM was deferring its threatened industrial action originally planned for next Monday to 1 March. Shares in RJB climbed 1p to 62.5p.

UBS sheds stake in Swiss Life as review continues

EUROPE'S LARGEST bank, UBS, is placing its 25 per cent stake in insurance group Swiss Life with institutions, raising \$1.4bn (£600m).

The move is part of the group's refocusing on its core private and investment banking operations. The bank has also said it is looking to sell its trade finance operations.

BY ANDREW GARFIELD
Financial Editor

The sale had been expected for some time. UBS has said that it would take a decision on the fate of its Swiss Life stake by March.

UBS and Swiss Life decided late last year that the attempt to co-operate was not working

as well as had been hoped when the alliance was forged in 1995.

Swiss Life has been a disappointing investment for UBS. The group's shares fell by 11 per cent last year because of worries about the impact on margins of competition in its domestic market. The insurer is largely domestically based.

An attempt to expand into France failed when it was beaten last year in the auction for GAN, the French state insurer.

UBS shares fell by 3 francs to SF443 yesterday.

There was some disappointment that the stake was placed with institutions rather than sold to a trade buyer which might have used it as a

platform to seek a merger with the group.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, the two companies said that the decision to sell was due to the "growing competition between the strategies pursued by the two groups in the area of asset gathering".

UBS is in the process of reviewing all of the areas of its

business in an attempt to boost profitability following the heavy losses sustained last autumn.

The review followed the departure of the chairman, Mathis Caballavetta, and several other board members, which was sparked by the bank's having to take a \$695m charge because of its involvement in Long-Term Capital

Management, the hedge fund.

Following the sale, the two companies will end the alliance which was set up in 1995 when UBS bought the stake, with Swiss Life buying out the bank's 50 per cent share in their insurance joint venture.

The Swiss Life chief executive, Manfred Zobl, will leave the UBS board.

SPORT

Five Nations: Ex-scaffolder prepares to dismantle the Scots as a kilted island-hopper looks for the chance to sparkle

Garforth masters in a new science

Front-row play no longer just a case of push and shove for England's late developing prop. By Chris Hewett

IT TAKES some believing, quite frankly, but Darren Garforth swears it is true. Far from being a natural-born prop who rucked and mauled his way around the Wendy houses of the East Midlands and drank in the black arts of scrummaging with his mother's milk, he appears to have spent his formative sporting years as one of life's pretty boys. "I played full-back for the school rugby team and centre-forward for a soccer side in Coventry called Folly Lane," he says proudly. A footballer? Garforth? Full the other one. A footballer, maybe, but surely not a footballer.

"No, really," he insists, an expression of purest innocence radiating from his war-torn front-rower's mug. "If it hadn't been for a football match being cancelled, I might never have played serious rugby at all. Some of my mates happened to drive by that very afternoon and they asked me if I fancied a run around. Suddenly, I was having the time of my life, wrestling away with some bloke in the scrums one minute and sharing a beer or two with him the next. This, I thought, is my sort of game."

And it remains Garforth's sort of game, even though his particular route to the top has been positively strewn with potholes and boulders. A spherical prop in the grand English tradition of Colin Smart and Gareth Chilcott, "The Baron" was five weeks short of his 31st birthday when he made his first two-minute excursion into the international arena - understandably, he had wondered whether he would ever make it - and six weeks into his 33rd year when he assumed his Test career had been firmly and finally laid to rest.

"When I failed to make last summer's southern hemisphere tour, I thought it was all over," he admitted this week.

Since when, Garforth has upgraded his fitness, improved his scrummaging, tripled his 80-minute tackle count, cemented his place on England's tight-head and pocketed a man of the match Kruger award for inspiring his countrymen to a famous victory over the record-equalling Springboks. Not half bad for a thirty-something has-been with a rearranged visage.

"Very nice, that man of the match business, but to be perfectly honest with you, it's not the sort of thing that means a great deal to me," he says. So what does mean a great deal? "Simply the fact that I'm in the England side and playing the best rugby of my life. I was bitterly disappointed at missing out on the tour, but Clive Wood-

ward was very fair and up-front with me. He told me to go away and get myself sorted, which I think I've done.

"You know inside when you're really fit, when you've put in the hard work and made the sacrifices. That's how I feel right now. Ready for anything."

Garforth is a walking, talking justification of professional rugby. Back in the dark ages, he would work a six and a half day week on building sites in Leicester and Coventry and Nuneaton. He was a scaffolder by trade; legend has it that he once described himself as a "tubular executive", but he denies it. "Cracking line, that one," he chuckles, "but I'm afraid it was someone else's. Still, it made me sound very important, so I was quite happy to associate myself with the description." There are many aspects of the amateur era that make him laugh, but he readily accepts that he would never have fulfilled his potential under the old rules and regulations.

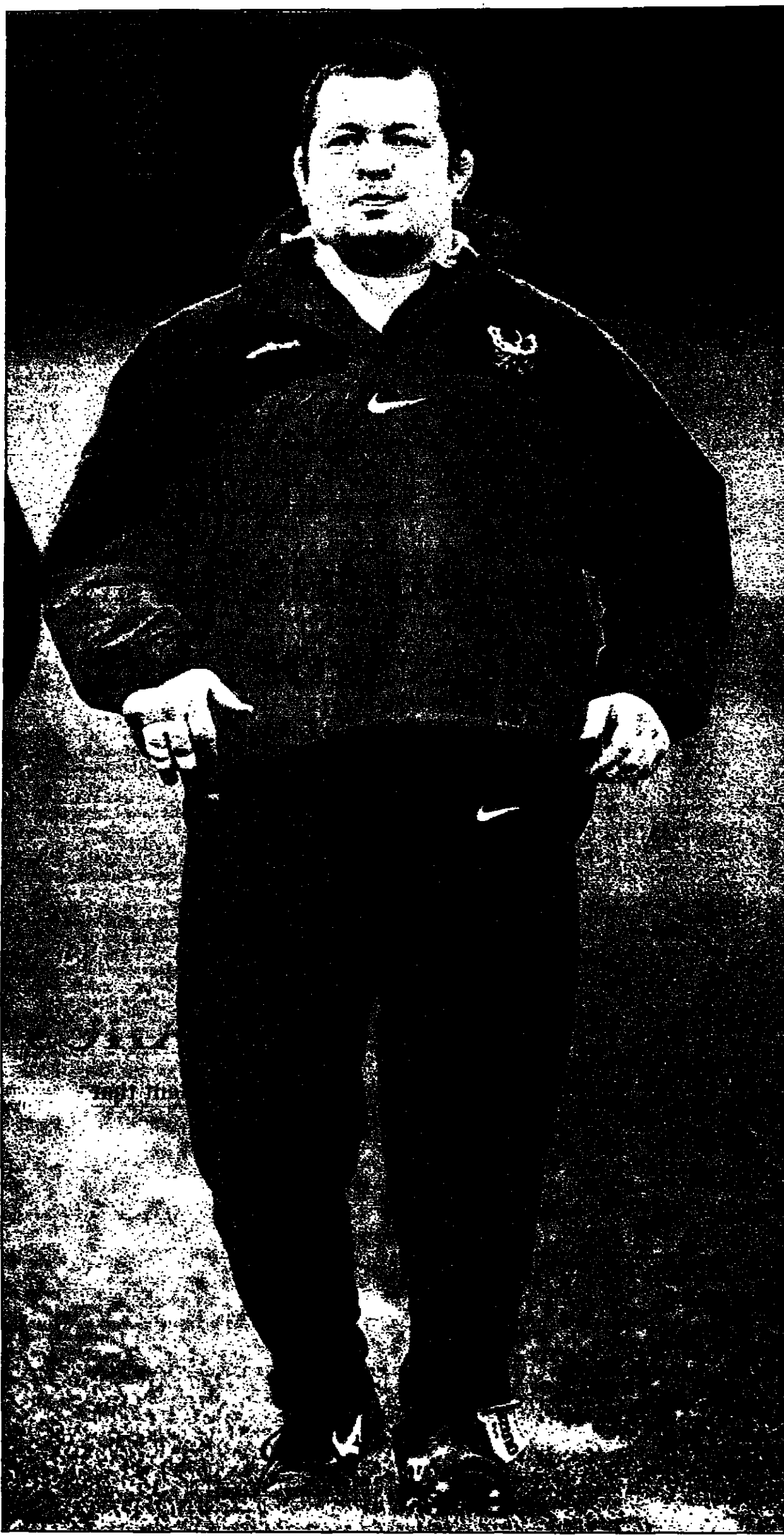
"I used to train whenever I could fit it in, which wasn't the ideal way of going about things. Turning pro transformed everything. For instance, I now make a point of training on a Sunday after a match. Just half an hour in the gym to work up a sweat and a nice swim to get the Saturday out of the system. As a full-timer, I can do all this and still be a family man, which is deeply important to me."

His close family includes Clare, his wife, and his three-year-old daughter Rebecca. But Garforth also sees the Leicester club as "family", not to mention the still wider but very exclusive band of beaten-up foot soldiers who inhabit the front rows of the world.

"Respect" is a big word in the scrummager's vocabulary. To earn it, a prop has to be bloody good at whatever it is he does down there in the dungeon.

"Jason Leonard," says Garforth in answer to the obvious question. "Now there's a bloke who's earned respect, not just here but across the world. In this game, you soon get to know who is up to scratch and who isn't and Jason's right up there. I can tell you. How many caps has he won? Nearly 70? Amazing. It's not easy on the body; it's all or nothing, every game you play. To stick in there as long as Jason is a hell of an achievement. People assume he's older than me because he's been around for ever, but he's two years younger."

"I've played against some very good props these last two years. Os du Randt, the South African, was the biggest, that's for sure. He was huge; I've got



Darren Garforth: "Clive Woodward told me to go away and get myself sorted, which I think I've done" David Ashdown

his Springbok shirt at home and, no exaggeration, we could use it as a tablecloth. I rate Craig Dowd, the All Black, and Christian Calmano, the Frenchman. We took a right hiding from the French in Paris last year. What went wrong? How long have you got? Let's just say we weren't tuned in.

"But that's the whole point, of course; you should learn something every time you play an international. People laugh

when a prop says this, but it really is a thinking man's game now. It's not just head down, arse up and shove; modern-day scrummaging is a precise science. "What goes on between their front row and ours can decide a match, quite definitely."

Which is precisely why Garforth's one-on-one tussle with Tom Smith, is one of the headline features of this afternoon's Calcutta Cup match. Neither man is particularly tall - they

are both 5ft 10in - and although Garforth is two stones heavier at 18st 7lb, the Scot's heavily stylised technique more than offsets any physical disadvantage. Both men "carry the ball up" and pride themselves on a double-figure tackle count, whatever the pace of the game. Forget the six-year age gap in Smith's favour. They are standard bearers for the same front row generation.

It is a generation far removed from anything Fran Cotton or Sandy Carmichael might have imagined back in the 1970s. "I took some fearful stick after Leicester's game with London Irish last weekend," revealed Garforth. "Fancy missing a tackle on that big Samoan of theirs. He was coming straight at me, too." A prop missing a tackle? Shameful. This daft old game is going to the dogs.

A discussion I had with some members of the British women's hockey team coming home from the Barcelona Olympics was equally lively, and equally useless, save for one small detail. The players were in high spirits - at least - after earning bronze medals, and a sense of playfulness informed their progress past me towards the back of the plane. After asking a familiar question - "What are you writing then?" - they craned over my shoulder to see the words on my computer screen. One of the players - it might have been that Jane Sixsmith - pointed with biblical authority to a word in my copy. Incorrectly spelled. And do

Metcalf aiming for Scottish kick-start

Former Kiwi full-back puts little store by bitter tales of torn tartan at Twickenham. By Chris Hewett

ACCORDING TO Glenn Metcalfe, one of the many kilted Kiwis currently reinventing their rugby personas in the hills and glens of Scotland, boredom and predictability are the twin evils of the union code. On the face of it, then, he should be contemplating this afternoon's 106th Calcutta Cup rumble with all the enthusiasm of a big-game fisherman marooned in a trout farm.

England-Scotland matches have been known to bore the most fanatical anoraks into submission, and as for the predictable, one look at the record book might make Metcalfe wonder whether it is worth his while turning up.

When it comes to winning at Twickenham, the Scots tend to operate on the sort of cycle that makes the arrival of Halley's Comet resemble a weekend trek to Tesco's. They managed it in 1926 and again in 1938 - a real golden age, that - but then paused for breath until Peter Brown's wonderfully distinctive slope-shouldered kicking earned them victory by a single point in 1971. Their last taste of honey in south-west London is a full 16 years distant; 11 points from Peter Dods, tries from Roy Laidlaw and Tom Smith and a sneaky little drop goal from Keith Robertson resulted in a surprisingly comfortable 22-12 canvas.

Fortunately for this latest Scottish vintage, the words "history" and "bunk" share a close proximity in the Metcalfe lexicon. "England are definitely beatable," remarked the 27-year-old full-back this week. "I personally think they are made out to be a lot better than they are. The All Blacks back home have the same sort of ability to intimidate by reputation, to run out on the field with their record striding before them. But visiting teams can use that as a positive as well as a negative. England will be a different kettle of fish to the Welsh side we played a fortnight ago, especially up front, but we're coming into this one off the back of a victory and there is confidence in the squad."

More confidence, certainly, than could be detected last summer, when Metcalfe broke into the squad and the recently-retired Rob Wainwright led his tourists into a two-Test series in Australia. The Wallabies had just put 76 points on England in Brisbane and while Metcalfe, who played in both internationals, and his new countrymen made rather more of a fist of things - they lost 45-3 in Sydney before stepping up a gear to hold John Eales' accomplished outfit to a 22-point winning margin in Brisbane - they too were forced to swallow indigestible helpings of pride. Injury prevented Metcalfe keeping a pre-Christmas

appointment with the Springboks, but he hit the ground running in the Five Nations curtain-raiser with Wales at Murrayfield, indulging his passion for the counter-attack by running from deep to manufacture a late game, set and match try for Scott Murray.

Loose English kicking would open up similar opportunities this afternoon, but this particular adventurer does not intend to wait around for Mike Catt miscues or Jonny Wilkinson slices. "I want to take a lot more ball coming into the line rather than simply run back kicks from a flat position, which was the case against Wales," he asserted.

"Also, I want to vary my game with a few kicks; if I don't jumble things up a bit, I might become predictable. To be honest, we didn't show much



'I want to vary my game with a few kicks; if I don't jumble things up a bit, I might become predictable'

variation as a team in the first match; there were lots of things we didn't try out, but then the Welsh allowed us very few scrum put-ins and line-out throws. There is more to come from us, much more, and with any luck we'll get the chance to really play against England."

Fie in the sky or a smart reading of the runes? Too many Calcutta Cup matches of recent vintage have been mean-minded, mean-spirited exercises in psychological one-upmanship and overtly nationalistic aggression, but the last two games have at least produced 11 tries - more than in the previous eight old-firm confrontations combined. If the most ancient international fixture of them all is finally catching on to the high-scoring imperatives of new-age professional rugby, Glenn Metcalfe is precisely the kind of thoroughly modern island-hopper to take advantage.

Experiencing highs and lows of plane speaking

A COLLEAGUE of mine recently had the fortune to find himself sitting next to Tony Banks on a flight home from Geneva.

Having fuelled the fire being lit under the feet of England's doomed manager, Glenn Hoddie, the Minister for Sport had spent two days sticking it to the International Olympic Committee in Switzerland over their ill-conceived strategy for doping control.

In the course of the two-hour return flight, my friend may have mused on the dizzying number of conversational gambits likely to jump-start the loquacious Banks. Or he may not. At any rate, no great exchange of ideas took place.

"I couldn't think what to



MIKE ROWBOTTOM

ask him," said my colleague. It would have been easy for me to have laughed. And, in fact, it was easy. But then I thought on, as they say in places like Coronation Street. I tried to

recall some of my great interviews with subjects I had encountered in planes. And I began to feel less smug.

Well, let me see now. There was the Judy Oakes interview, conducted somewhere over India on the return journey from the 1990 Auckland Commonwealth Games. How did that opening line go as Britain's multiple shuttled champion passed down the aisle? Ah yes. "All right, Judy?" The interviewee, beaten to the gold by her domestic rival Myrtle Angee, responded with a brave smile which pains me to recall. "Felt better," she replied, her face pale with disappointment. Actually, it looked as if she had been crying. Good one.

Talking to the British bobsleigh coach, Tom de la Hunty, on the way back from last year's Winter Olympics in Nagano was a fundamentally different experience. Buoyed up by the first British bobsleigh medal at the Games since Dixon and Nash's victory in 1964, the voluble RAF physical training instructor was congenially himself as he took up an unofficial posting as bar steward.

Hunting and gathering fins of lager in a way that any cave-dwelling ancestor would have appreciated, De la Hunty, a member of Britain's two-man bob at the 1988 Calgary Olympics, took me and the other team members who were listening on a lightning

trip around his old bobsleigh haunts - Winterberg, La Plagne, Cortina - before flashing onwards to a condemnation of the tampering which had seen Switzerland's top sled ruled illegal and then coming to a gradual halt over the topic of escalating tension between the West and Iraq. If things, as he put it, "kicked off", then his leave was cancelled and he would be involved in monitoring levels of hazard from any biological warfare.

Preoccupied by this disturbing vision, and with the keen blade of my mind blunted as a result of De la Hunty's successful foraging, I returned to my seat and forgot all the details. I'm sorry, but there it is.

A discussion I had with some members of the British women's hockey team coming home from the Barcelona Olympics was equally lively, and equally useless, save for one small detail.

The players were in high spirits - at least - after earning bronze medals, and a sense of playfulness informed their progress past me towards the back of the plane. After asking a familiar question - "What are you writing then?" - they craned over my shoulder to see the words on my computer screen. One of the players - it might have been that Jane Sixsmith - pointed with biblical authority to a word in my copy. Incorrectly spelled. And do

you know? They seemed to think that was amusing in some way.

Useful things I have learned while aboard an aeroplane probably boil down to this: your feet swell up on long-haul flights and, in the unlikely event of oxygen masks being required, cigarettes should be extinguished.

In truth, I ought to add another thing to that list. When you are eating in-flight meals, the stuff in the thin paper tube is sugar, not salt. Salt is in the little sachets and tastes quite different.

One memorable, if brief, exchange of words does stick in my memory, although it came not in a plane, but in an

airport terminal. Thankfully I was a witness rather than a participant when a fellow member of Her Majesty's Press asked the driver of Britain's Olympic bobsleigh bronze medalists, Sean Olsson, to display the fruits of his labours in Nagano.

Olsson obliged, swinging the heavy disc proudly from its ribbon.

"Very nice," said my friend. "Bet you wish it was gold." It was a risky thing, no, a foolhardy thing to say to a 15-stone SAS paratrooper. For a moment there was what you might call an awkward pause.

Then Olsson spoke: "It's gold to me."

Now that was a good line.

Five Nations: Henry and Gatland come face to face as formidable Irish aim to continue domination

Wales driven by fear of failure

THE HARSH fact of sporting life is the good performances are generally buried under the most recent poor ones. So it is with Wales. That spirited showing against South Africa and Argentina last autumn is but a vague memory, while the bitterness of the defeat at Murrayfield lingers just over Welsh shoulders and will continue to do so until the Dragons roar in triumph again.

Today they begin as underdogs against a much-fancied Ireland side which boasts one of the finest tight fives in the Five Nations, a lethal set of backs and a string of victories in Cardiff that stretch back to the previous decade - six out of seven wins over Wales, the best the home side could manage was a draw in 1991.

There is a difference this year. Wales are not in Cardiff. They are at their second home, Wembley, where they had a motivational kick around with a couple of footballs on the pitch yesterday morning, a ground they have adopted until completion of the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff later this year.

And while Ireland may have made the Cardiff Arms Park their second home, the slate is wiped clean for the time being, since they are appearing at Wembley for the first time. And of course Wales have their guru, coach Graham Henry.

By DAVID LLEWELLYN

vinced Gatland would go on to distinguish himself at cricket and said: "Who would have thought that Warren would be preparing a rugby team to take on a team that I have prepared?"

While it may be no reflection of their previous teacher-pupil relationship, Gatland has certainly done his homework on what to expect from Henry.

"We expect the Welsh to try to break up the game," said Gatland, who took over as Ireland coach after Brian Ashton resigned just over 11 months ago. "They will try to tap and go through Rob Howley and play at pace. And they will speed up the line-outs."

Now there is an interesting one. Henry expressed his disappointment at the attitude of English referee Ed Morrison to the style of line-out play that Wales have employed under Henry's influence, where the selected forwards run to the mark at the last minute and the jumper is able to launch himself at the ball while the other side are still taking stock of how many players they should have had in the line to start out with.

Henry was so upset with Morrison that he wrote to Steve Griffiths, the International Board's Referee Development Officer, last week, tabling his objections and requesting clarification on a number of points.

"I got a letter back," an unhappy Henry said. "The letter back did not answer any of the points I raised. I had asked for a definitive statement on how international rugby games were going to be refereed at the line-out. What I wanted back was a series of points from A to whatever. What I actually got back was a general statement."

So no help. But there is one bright spot for Henry and Wales, today's referee is an Australian, Scott Young, and in Henry's eyes that is no bad thing. "I think southern hemisphere referees are attacker friendly, in other words those with the ball are given more opportunity to keep it; referees in the northern hemisphere are defensive friendly, they like a contest at the tackle for the ball. That's just the way it is."

"You therefore have to coach a little differently because of the interpretation of the law at the tackle. I would prefer the referees to be attacker friendly because it's an easier game to coach, it makes my job that much easier."

The Irish had better beware as well, for they suffered from indiscipline against France.

In fact, team manager Donald Lenihan declared: "People have been focusing on the place kicking as the cause of our defeat against France, but we honestly believe we lost that game because of indiscipline in the last 20 minutes. We have spoken to the players individually and collectively about this. When there is someone of the quality of Neil Jenkins as a place kicker around then we will have to watch our discipline very carefully."

FIVE NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts		
Scotland	1	0	0	33	20	2			
France	1	0	0	10	9	2			
Wales	1	0	0	10	33	0			
Ireland	1	0	0	1	9	10			
England	0	0	0	0	0	0			
RESULTS: 6 Feb: Ireland 9 France 10 (at Lansdowne Road); Scotland 33, Wales 20 (at Murrayfield).									
EXTRA: Today: Wales v Ireland (at Wembley); England v Scotland (at Twickenham); 6 March: France v Wales (at Stade de France); Ireland v England (at Lansdowne Road); 20 March: England v France (at Twickenham); Scotland v Ireland (at Murrayfield); 10 April: France v Scotland (at Stade de France); 11 April: Wales v England (at Wembley).									

A Messiah-like figure after those games against Argentina and South Africa, he is reduced to the status of a mere mortal after the Scotland defeat a fortnight ago.

There is little doubt, though, that Henry, a New Zealander of exacting standards and an innovative rugby brain, has imbued his charges with more confidence than they had displayed prior to his coming among them. He is looking for something that he felt was sorely lacking against the Scots.

"I think we had the fear of failure against South Africa, we were bloody scared they were going to kill us," he explained. "And we didn't have the fear of failure against Scotland. So the fear of failure can help. I hope it's back now."

It is probably much the same for the Irish. They too have their southern hemisphere influence. Warren Gatland, like Henry, is a Kiwi. The pair have never crossed swords on a rugby pitch, but when Gatland was a promising opening batsman for Hamilton Grammar School, Henry, a teacher, was coach of Auckland Grammar.

At that time Henry was con-

WALES v IRELAND									
at Wembley									
S Howarth	15	C O'Shea	London Irish	14 J Bishop	London Irish	13 K Magge	Bath	12 J Bell	Dungannon
M Robson	Swansea	11 N Woods	London Irish	10 D Humphreys	Dungannon	9 C McGuinness	St Mary's Coll	8 P Clobessy	Young Munster
M Taylor	Swansea	7 R Wood	Hartlepool	6 P Wallace	Saracens	5 J Davidson	Castres	4 P Johns	Saracens
S Gibbs	Swansea	3 P Wallace	Saracens	2 R Wood	Hartlepool	1 D O'Connell	Sale	1 M Williams	Ballymahinch
D James	Pontypridd	1 N Woods	London Irish	10 D Humphreys	Dungannon	9 C McGuinness	St Mary's Coll	8 P Clobessy	Young Munster
N Jenkins	Pontypridd	7 R Wood	Hartlepool	6 P Wallace	Saracens	5 J Davidson	Castres	4 P Johns	Saracens
R Howley	Cardiff	3 P Wallace	Saracens	2 R Wood	Hartlepool	1 D O'Connell	Sale	1 M Williams	Ballymahinch
D Morris	Swansea	1 N Woods	London Irish	10 D Humphreys	Dungannon	9 C McGuinness	St Mary's Coll	8 P Clobessy	Young Munster
B Williams	Richmond	7 R Wood	Hartlepool	6 P Wallace	Saracens	5 J Davidson	Castres	4 P Johns	Saracens
D Young	Cardiff	3 P Wallace	Saracens	2 R Wood	Hartlepool	1 D O'Connell	Sale	1 M Williams	Ballymahinch
C O'Connell	Richmond	1 N Woods	London Irish	10 D Humphreys	Dungannon	9 C McGuinness	St Mary's Coll	8 P Clobessy	Young Munster
C Wyatt	Llanelli	7 R Wood	Hartlepool	6 P Wallace	Saracens	5 J Davidson	Castres	4 P Johns	Saracens
C Charlvis	Swansea	3 P Wallace	Saracens	2 R Wood	Hartlepool	1 D O'Connell	Sale	1 M Williams	Ballymahinch
M Williams	Pontypridd	1 N Woods	London Irish	10 D Humphreys	Dungannon	9 C McGuinness	St Mary's Coll	8 P Clobessy	Young Munster
S O'Connell	Llanelli	7 R Wood	Hartlepool	6 P Wallace	Saracens	5 J Davidson	Castres	4 P Johns	Saracens

Replacements: 16 K Morgan (Pontypridd); 17 L Davies (Cardiff); 18 D Llewellyn (Bristol); 19 M Vayle (Llanelli); 20 A Lewis (Cardiff); 21 C Anthony (Swansea); 22 G Jenkins (Swansea).

Referee: S Young (Australia)

Kick-off: 3.0 (BBC1)

Healey ban 'inadequate' England head rankings

LONDON IRISH yesterday criticised the three-week ban imposed by Leicester on the scrum-half Austin Healey for stamping on his opposite number, Kevin Putt, during last weekend's Allied Dunbar Premiership match at Welford Road as "inadequate", writes Andrew Baldock.

The Exiles' management team will proceed with their citing against Healey for the incident which left Putt requiring six stitches above his right eye. It means that Healey, whose 21-day club suspension rules him out of two Five Nations Championship matches with England and Leicester's Telford Bitter Cup quarter-final against Richmond, now faces the possibility of further disciplinary action.

The recommended Rugby Football Union punishment for stamping is 12 weeks, but anything up to a six-month ban could be imposed by Twickenham's disciplinary board. Healey capped 18 times, will be summoned to attend an RFU hearing

and, if found guilty, must expect a considerable spell on the sidelines. Healey maintains that the 13th-minute incident was "a complete accident," even though television pictures clearly showed him trampling on Putt's face as the South African lay at the bottom of a ruck.

The Exiles' management team met on Thursday night to discuss Leicester's internal disciplinary action, but were not appeased.

"London Irish Rugby Football Club consider Austin Healey's explanation of his action last Saturday as unsatisfactory, and his suspension by Leicester Tigers as inadequate in the circumstances," said a club statement. "Accordingly, the matter is now in the hands of the Rugby Football Union."

The England coach, Clive Woodward, reacted to the Leicester ban by leaving Healey out of his squad for today's Calcutta Cup match in the Five Nations against Scotland at Twickenham.

"I've decided to leave Austin out of the squad until the matter is resolved by an RFU hearing," Woodward said. "The decision is in the best interests of the player and the England squad."

Leicester convened their own disciplinary hearing last Monday within hours of Irish giving formal notice that they would be citing Healey. The four-man panel, which included the Tigers manager Dean Richards and their chief executive, Peter Wheeler, decided that Healey had shown no wilful intent, but added that: "It was considered other actions could have been taken to avoid the contact."

The unsighted referee Graham Hughes took no action against Healey, while Putt opted for playing the incident down, describing it as "just one of those things". But, on further scrutiny of the match video, Irish chose the citing option, and Healey must now brace himself for severe consequences.

O'Shea leads Wembley charge of the Exiles trio

London Irish full-back is confident that club understanding will prove crucial against Wales today. By David Llewellyn

defence. As often as not they will counter-attack from behind their own line and invariably to good effect. Woods is the leading try scorer in the Premiership with 11, O'Shea and Bishop account for a further nine between them.

But there is no question of the three of them trying to take on the Welsh by themselves. O'Shea explained: "As a unit we will be trying to do what is best for the team. The number one thing we have to do is carry out our basics; catch, kick,

tackle, and get a solid base so the guys in front of us can draw confidence from that. Everything else will flow from there."

"We are not looking to be stars. If we start doing the stupid things - and you always know when chances are on - if we try to press too much, or try to impose ourselves on the game, that's when mistakes will be made. It's a matter of applying common sense. International level is a step up, but yes, it's on, of course we have been encouraged to go for it. But if the opportunity doesn't arise against Wales, if it means no touches for us in the back three, but we win, then that is all that matters."

The concept of the team runs strongly through O'Shea and rest of his international colleagues. "As an indication of how good the spirit is in the squad," explained the London Irish captain, "last Monday, after the defeat against France, I got phone calls from some of the guys and we all agreed that, as much as we want to and enjoy playing for our clubs, we could not wait to get back together again for the following Sunday."

"And if we have such a great squad spirit now when we are going through the hard times, you have to wonder what will happen when we start winning. Look at the confidence that will bring. All the same, it's one thing enjoying being with

each other, but we still have to win."

To that end, it would be fair to say that without the powerhouses in the pack, the backs would be next to useless as a strikeforce. The Ireland front five is being called the best in the tournament. But O'Shea insisted: "They won't go out there thinking that, because they know if they do they will get their come-uppance. We know we all have to work hard for each other."

"Essentially the backs are only as good as the forwards. Someone once said: 'The forwards decide who wins matches, the backs decide by how much,' and that is the truth. The person who scores the points knows that someone inside has done the dirty work, the hard graft. This is purely team, team, team."

There was an edge to O'Shea's voice when he said: "We badly need to win. We have lost so many matches by one score or one point in the last year or so. We need to turn one of those into a victory."

He and the rest of the Ireland team relish the prospect of trotting out at Wembley, a little moment of history for them all. "Playing against Wales in the Arms Park has always been a special thing," explained O'Shea, "the crowds, the singing, it's the kind of atmosphere you dream about. It's going to be a great moment for every player to walk out in the shadow of the twin towers. But, to be honest, if I were given a chance to go to a ground with no-one there to watch us and play Wales and beat them, I'd take it." Point taken.

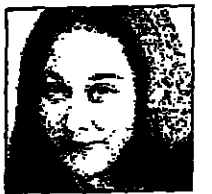


O'Shea: 'Badly need to win'



The Wales captain Robert Howley and his fellow players get together at yesterday's final training session at Wembley Allsport

Roll on spring and my Gnats



ANNALISA BARBIERI
ON FISHING

I AM nowhere near a river and am sad. There is no crisp, frosted grass to crunch over, only horrid grey carpet tiles separating horrid grey desks all around. In place of twinkling sunlight there is electric light that neither warms nor cheers me like the proper stuff does. I am surrounded by people that do not know one end of a fishing rod from the other and think what I do is queer.

Hurry up spring! When the trout season reopens and I can dig out my favourite Parachute Black Gnats and flick dry flies onto pretty rivers to raise wild browns. How well I shall iron my fishing shirt to welcome it back from the depths of the cupboard. How polished my reels will be and how I shall wind them back and forth to prepare myself for the sound of them singing for real on the river bank. My fishing lines, all of them, be them floating, sinking or intermediate, will be bathed in the splendours of specialist line cleaner and dried upon Irish linen cloths. I shall even clean the treads of my Hunter boots with my toothbrush, if only Spring would hurry up.

This time last week I was in Scotland, on the Tay. Just up river from Glendelvine Water where my heroine, Georgina Ballantine, caught her big old salmon, nearly 69 years ago now. What a bloody long time ago. In 69 years from now I shall be dead and anyway the rivers will be barren.

Perhaps I should be a ghillie and get to fish all the time or anyway be near water and in the countryside where every vista feeds my eyes and calms my brain. But my Spey casting is not good enough for ghillieing despite the personal attentions of Ally Gowans last week. It was the sink tips that got me. You need sink tips to get the fly deep to the riverbed but dragging line off mightily salmon rivers is hard enough without a sink tip to weigh it down.

But anyway there were no salmon, not even Ally could raise them. His dog Bramble kept trying to swim out to his master whilst Tally, the ghillie's dog, peed on Bramble's head in between fetching endless pebbles thrown for him by me. He chewed them with now blunt, 11-year-old teeth before returning them, glistening with dog spit, to my feet.

After fishing we all returned to Ally's house where he drank three cups of coffee and then showed us his web page where there is a picture of me tying an Ally's Shrimp fly. We saw his tackle cupboard, full of reels, none of them particularly fancy. His son, Andrew, explained fish ladders (there is a fine one up the road at Pitlochry) that help salmon get upstream when the river is dammed. Then to "Numpy's" for dinner. A fine dinner is all the finer after a good day's fishing. I ate haggis and drank whisky and Ally told us tale after tale of fish and folk and jokes he had played on everybody. He must be owed some, I thought. On the wall, above his head, was a cast of another fisherman's steelhead trout that had been caught, incredibly, from the Tay.

On the way home from Pitlochry to Kinnaird we crossed an old railway bridge that spans the Tay. Scottish skies always have more stars, of that I'm sure. I looked down at the Tay and thought how wonderful she looked and how magical it would be to fish for salmon at night. A coal fire waited for us at home and we toasted marshmallows with makeshift toasting forks (I think they were laundry tongs), until our lips were pink with sugar. Regular sips of whisky were required to take away the sweetness, and regular melting pots of marshmallow were required to take away the sting of whisky. And so it went on.

The next day I had to ring the ghillie to say we could not fish before noon, due to religious reasons. That afternoon yielded no fish, but a bit of rain that streaked a rainbow across the sky. Then hags had to be packed, whisky bottles drained and trains caught. Back to town, back to grey and far away from rivers.

a.barbieri@independent.co.uk

PUNTERS' GUIDE

Steve Smith Eccles analyses
this afternoon's William Hill
Handicap Hurdle at Ascot



Outset: Fitness could fail this individual, off the track since a run on the Flat last November.

Polar Prospect: Disappointing lately and well below par in the Tote Gold Trophy. This trip could prove too far.

Effectual: Fifth in the Tote Gold Trophy and sure to be better suited by this two and a half miles over a stiffer course.

Sadler's Finish: Stayed on strongly to finish third behind Decapage in the Tote Gold Trophy and should run a big race over this longer trip.

Moondigga: Something was obviously amiss when he was pulled up at Sandown, but this Irish import is worth another chance.

Globe Runner: A consistent sort who ran a good fourth to Teatral at Sandown and has each-way prospects.

Bluedonts: Not disgraced when third to the highly-regarded Barton at Doncaster but this progressive type may be up against it in this competitive handicap.

Ismene: Ran a cracker when winning by 13 lengths at Towcester after a two-year break. You can never discount one of David Elsworth's runners.

Castle Owen: Unbeaten in his three starts this season and clearly on the upgrade. However, he must improve again to figure here.

Mister Ram: Well beaten in the Tote Gold Trophy but this extra half-mile could be just what he needs.

Darbela: Arthur Moore has not sent this mare over to Ireland for a picnic. She won at Leopardstown last time and enters calculations off a light weight.

Supreme Genotini: Reportedly plagued by back trouble, so one to avoid.

Conclusion: Darbela must be respected on the strength of her victory at Leopardstown, while Moondigga must figure if firing on all cylinders. However, one of the others all have to beat SADLER'S FINISH, staying on strongly in the Tote Gold Trophy and sure to relish this extra half-mile.

ASCOT
1.20: ANDSUEPHI could be anything after an easy win against weaker rivals at Wincanton. He will start at decent odds and the 7lb he gets from Lord Of The River is a plus.

1.50: Robert Thornton has just the one ride before travelling on to Warwick and it looks a winning one with CASTLE OWEN carrying just 10st 8lb after rattling up a hat-trick in a lower league. The gelding's staminate Bluedonts looks dangerous in his first handicap, and Irish raider Darbela also makes some appeal with a feather weight.

2.25: Teton Mill comes down in distance and might just struggle when the tempo is increased. Norman Williamson will be wary of his old mate SUPER COIN, who always runs a stormer on this course and was successful with a big weight at Haydock last time. Mick Fitzgerald takes the ride and will be turning on the heat from the home turn.

NEWCASTLE
2.45: LISTEN TIMMY failed to handle the heavy going when a distant fifth to Step On Eyre at Wetherby last time, but the prospect of better ground today can trigger a revival of the jumping skills that saw this big 10-year-old score a Uttoter hat-trick last season.

3.20: Peter Monteith holds LORD PODGSKI in high regard. This course winner missed almost all of last season with a knee injury but now, after twice finishing behind Crystal Gift in heavy-ground races at Ayr this season, looks set to reverse the form and make his mark in decent company.

HYPERION
TV TIPS

son, looks set to reverse the form and make his mark in decent company.

3.50: Young Kenny is the apple of Peter Beaumont's eye and this eight-year-old's second to the improving Step On Eyre at Wetherby last month was a very smart display. THE LAST FLING, a talented hurdler whom Sue Smith held such high hopes for over fences, has lately been a bitter disappointment. But at long odds, it could be worth giving him a final chance now he steps up to this marathon trip.

WARWICK
3.05: UNSINKABLE BOXER rattled off the Cheltenham-Aintree hurdles double and is set to show his chasing worth now that he gets a suitable test of stamina. Spendid is very tough but he was easily brushed aside by the Pipe horse at the festival.

4.10: TRESOR DE MAI didn't beat much at Lingfield but he did it in the style of a horse who can shine in a stronger league. He gets his chance today against the flag-sited Kempton winner Flagship Ubralles.

4.40: WITH IMPUNITY has the knack of winning when fresh so he rates a worthy bet against the likely winner favourite The Outback Way. He trotted up at Aintree on his reappearance last season and later gained a success from Jibber The Kibber on this course.

10-YEAR-OLD ON THE EIDER CHASE

Year	1989	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98
Fate of the favourites:	4	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Winner's place in betting:	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Starting prices:	11-2	13-2	11-2	11-2	11-2	11-2	11-2	11-2	11-2	11-2
Winners' weights:	91	100	91	97	100	100	100	100	100	100
Winners' ages:	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Profit or loss to £1 stake: Favourites - £100										
Second Favourite: £20.25										
Percentage of winners placed 2nd and 3rd in last race: 75%										
Shortest-priced winner: Seven Tons (1997) 2-1										
Longest-priced winner: David Duff (1997) 16-1										
Top trainer: No trainer has won this race more than once in the past 10 years										
Top jockey: P Niven (2) - Walsford (1989) Seven Tons (1997)										

FIRST SHOW

ASCOT 1.50									
Distance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1st	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2nd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3rd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

NEWCASTLE 2.45									
Distance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1st	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2nd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3rd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

NEWCASTLE

HYPERION
1.35 Dangerman
2.10 Aicko
2.45 Listen Timmy
3.20 LORD PODGSKI (map)

GOING: Good to Soft.
Left-hand, oval course; with heavy run-in; rough, galloping track.
Course is an A1, 5m N of town. Free return bus service from Rainton, Four Lane Ends and South Gosforth stations (2 hours before racing). 1 hour after.
ADMISSION: Club £15 (incl. for OAPs and registered disabled); £10 for OAPs and registered disabled; Silver Ring £5 (incl. for OAPs and registered disabled).
Under 16s free in all enclosures. CASH PRIZE: Free.
FIVE-YEAR STATISTICS
LEADING TRAINERS: Mrs M Reveley 45-57 (24.9%), J Howard Johnson 13-24 (24.9%), M J Jeffery 20-24 (24.9%), L Lingo 27-27 (24.9%), M W Esler 28-33 (24.9%).
LEADING JOCKEYS: R Haves 45-50 (20.9%), G Gentry 20-22 (18.9%), A Cribbin 17-26 (23.9%), B Storey 14-17 (24.9%), P Carberry 22-24 (24.9%), R Suttle 15-20 (24.9%).
FAVOURITES: 65-64 (42.9%).
LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS: 1st of 10 (24.9%), 2nd of 10 (24.9%), 3rd of 10 (24.9%).
BLINKERED FIRST TIME: 20.9% (24.9%).
BLINKERED FIRST TIME: 20.9% (24.9%).

1.35 TOTE NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS E) £3,000 added 2m									
Distance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1st	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2nd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3rd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9th	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

BETTING: 9-4 Aicko, 5-4 Dangerman, 11-4 Listen Timmy, 13-4 Lord Podgski, 14-1 Aicko, 15-1 Aicko, 16-1 Aicko, 17-1 Aicko, 18-1 Aicko, 19-1 Aicko, 20-1 Aicko, 21-1 Aicko, 22-1 Aicko, 23-1 Aicko, 24-1 Aicko, 25-1 Aicko, 26-1 Aicko, 27-1 Aicko, 28-1 Aicko, 29-1 Aicko, 30-1 Aicko, 31-1 Aicko, 32-1 Aicko, 33-1 Aicko, 34-1 Aicko, 35-1 Aicko, 36-1 Aicko, 37-1 Aicko, 38-1 Aicko, 39-1 Aicko, 40-1 Aicko, 41-1 Aicko, 42-1 Aicko, 43-1 Aicko, 44-1 Aicko, 45-1 Aicko, 46-1 Aicko, 47-1 Aicko, 48-1 Aicko, 49-1 Aicko, 50-1 Aicko, 51-1 Aicko, 52-1 Aicko, 53-1 Aicko, 54-1 Aicko, 55-1 Aicko, 56-1 Aicko, 57-1 Aicko, 58-1 Aicko, 59-1 Aicko, 60-1 Aicko, 61-1 Aicko, 62-1 Aicko, 63-1 Aicko, 64-1 Aicko, 65-1 Aicko, 66-1 Aicko, 67-1 Aicko, 68-1 Aicko, 69-1 Aicko, 70-1 Aicko, 71-1 Aicko, 72-1 Aicko, 73-1 Aicko, 74-1 Aicko, 75-1 Aicko, 76-1 Aicko, 77-1 Aicko, 78-1 Aicko, 79-1 Aicko, 80-1 Aicko, 81-1 Aicko, 82-1 Aicko, 83-1 Aicko, 84-1 Aicko, 85-1 Aicko, 86-1 Aicko, 87-1 Aicko, 88-1 Aicko, 89-1 Aicko, 90-1 Aicko, 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Lawrie storms five clear in wind

PAUL LAWRIE is on course to win the first six-figure cheque of his career following another scintillating performance at the Qatar Masters. Two clear after a second-round 65, the 30-year-old from Aberdeen defied strong winds to add a joint best-of-the-day 67 and go into today's final round with a five-stroke advantage.

Lawrie, who missed the halfway cut by eight shots in last week's Dubai Desert Classic, stands on an 18-under-par total of 200. France's Jean van de Velde is his nearest challenger in the race for the £102,283 first prize, with two more Scots — Bernard Gallacher's nephew Stephen and Raymond Russell — sharing third with Midlander John Bickerton a stroke further back.

Lawrie's previous biggest pay-day was the 1996 Volvo PGA championship at Wentworth, where he collected nearly £87,000 for finishing tied second with Nick Faldo. Two behind Costantino Rocca. His one tour victory was at the Catalan Open the same year, an event reduced to 36 holes by fierce winds.

Conditions were nowhere near as bad yesterday, and hav-

GOLF
BY MARK GARROD
in Doha

ing been brought up on Scotland's north-east coast he had no fears about being blown about. Three birdies in the opening four holes — the first after he almost holed his pitch — set the tone, and two more had come before he dropped his first shot of the week on the 470-yard 15th. A drive into rough there was just a temporary blip — back he came, holing a 30-foot putt on the next. Lawrie said: "I felt calm, in control and comfortable. I knew I was swinging well."

While South African Ernie Els blew a six-shot last-day lead in Perth only last month, Lawrie is comforted by the memory of what happened to him the last time he held such a big lead. It was in the European Under-25 championship in France in 1992 and he turned a six-stroke advantage into a win by eight.

The following year Lawrie finished sixth in the Open at Sandwich, holing a three-iron for an eagle two at the penultimate hole. "I really struggled

after that," he recalled. "Everybody expected me to keep it going — and so did I. It was tough to live up to it. I thought that if I could be sixth in the Open I should compete regularly for tournaments and when I didn't it was hard to cope with mentally."

Lawrie was helped by sessions with the sports psychologist Dr Richard Cox, an adviser to the Scotland rugby

team. "I used to travel to his home and chat for three to four hours at a time. He also gave me tapes, which were very helpful. It was unbelievable. They sent me to sleep."

Van de Velde, another former European Under-25 champion who has won only once on the Tour in 10 years, moved into second place by grabbing birdies at two of the last four holes for a 70.

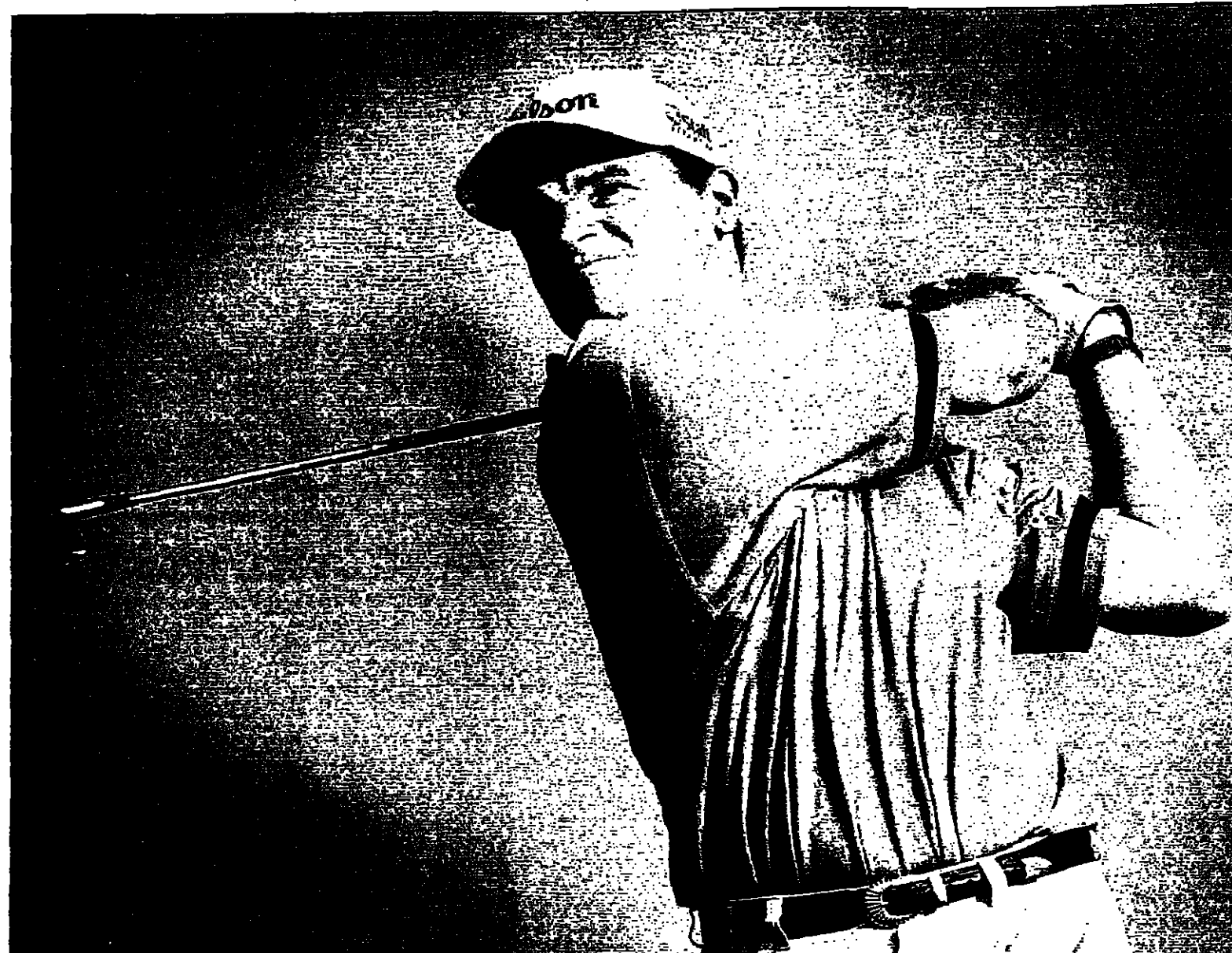
Russell, winner of the 1996 Cannes Open, matched that while the 24-year-old Gallacher, making his tour comeback after suffering back problems and losing his card two years ago, returned a 69 and Bickerton a 71. Jan Woomers is eight behind following a 70, and Ryder Cup captain Mark James '72 left him 10 adrift.

England's David Howell, on the strength of his victory in last

week's Dubai Desert Classic, leads the PGA European Tour money list after five events. Howell has winnings of 204,172 euros (£139,843) followed by Els (£69,045/£115,784) and Lee Westwood of England (£32,216/£90,558).

Westwood was the runner-up last season to Colin Montgomerie in season's earnings. The PGA European Tour switched this season to quoting

its winnings in the new European currency, the euro. QATAR MASTERS (Doha) Leading third round scores and totals (59 or less unless stated): 200 P Lawrie 68 65 67, 205 J Van de Velde (F) 69 66 70, 206 S Gallacher 69 68 69, 207 B Bickerton 69 71, 207 A Cella (S) 69 68, 208 P Russell 69 69, 209 J Woomers 70 70, 209 B James (US) 70 70, 210 M March 70, 210 S Wootton 70 70, 211 G Evans 69 70 71, 211 M Gribben (S) 72, 212 M James 67 71, 212 S James 71 67, 212 Selected: 214 A Cotnam 71 69, 214 P Broadhurst 72 72, 214 G Brand 72 72, 75 P Walton 72 71, 76



The swing of confidence as Scotland's Paul Lawrie leaves his rivals trailing in the Qatar Masters in Doha yesterday

Allsport

In-form Dott proves a point

SNOOKER

GRAEME DOTT reached the first semi-final of his career yesterday, recovering from a 4-2 deficit to defeat Paul Hunter in the Scottish Open in Aberdeen.

Just as he had done against the former world champion, John Parrott, in the previous round, Dott triumphed 5-4, much to his own surprise.

"At no stage did I ever think I was going to win," said the 21-year-old Glaswegian, who was one of four Scotsmen — the others being John Higgins, Alan McManus and Stephen Hendry — competing on quarter-final day at the Exhibition and Conference Centre.

"But when I got back to 4-4 I thought I might have a good chance. I know it was a scrappy game, but as long as you win it doesn't matter how unattractive the match is."

"When I was playing like that in the past I would get annoyed and ended up losing. Now, I'm out there to win any way I can, and it doesn't matter if a frame takes an hour as long as you win it."

Dott's new mental toughness has resulted from a lengthy meeting with Terry Griffiths, the former world champion.

The determined Dott revealed that after beating Parrott he had spent four hours at Griffiths's Llanelli home after the Welsh Open discussing ways to "put my head straight".

Until his meeting with the respected Welshman the world No 30, who turned professional in 1994, had contemplated giving up the game for good. Now, he says, he is glad he listened to the voice of experience. Dott is guaranteed £16,000, which is easily the biggest cheque of his career thus far.

It was not the best of matches against the 20-year-old Hunter, who had himself knocked out the defending champion, Ronnie O'Sullivan, in the last 32. Hunter's best break was just 49, while Dott saved his best until last with a run of 60 to take control of the deciding frame.

However, the match was won and lost in the penultimate frame. Hunter was in the driving seat, with Dott needing snookers until he unfortunately potted the pink try to play safe off the final blue.

Dott then fluked the blue off two cushions and went on to take pink and black to keep the game alive. Hunter led 32-0 in the deciding but then ran out of position. Dott made 60 and eventually forced the concession when he knocked in the brown ball.

"I had my chances to win 5-3 but couldn't take them," said Hunter, who had also been 3-1 up at the interval.

Dott added: "When you get to the semi-final your aim is to go on to win the tournament — not to settle for reaching this far in the event."

Dutch test awaits champion Couch

THE CAUSE of women's boxing should receive a significant boost tonight when Jane Couch defends her Womens International Boxing Federation welter-weight title against the Dutch challenger, Marischa Slaw, at the Thornaby Leisure Centre, Middlesbrough.

Widely accepted elsewhere around the world, female boxing remains something of a novelty here. Couch is the country's only professional pugilist although she had to take the British Boxing Board of Control

BOXING
BY NICK HALLING

to court before being granted a licence. Then in the first officially sanctioned female match in the UK, she disposed of the hapless German teenager Simone Lukic in just over three minutes at Streatham, south London, last November.

That affair was little short of farcical: the German looked like an aerobic instructor and boxed like one, too. In con-

trast, the Dutch woman appears genuinely formidable. Now based in Florida, she has fought credible American opponents in Lisa Esteed and Kathy Collins, both current world champions.

"I was at the Streatham show, and all I will say is that it is going to be very different this time," said the promoter, Jonathan Feld. "This is a serious fight and, from what I have seen, Jane will be up against it. This is a chance for the British public to see what women's

boxing is all about." Couch, originally from Fleetwood, but now based in Bristol, won her title from the Frenchwoman Sandra Geiger in May 1996, successfully defending it against two Americans, Andrea Deshong and Leah Mellinger, a year later. Her only loss came against another American, Dora "Swamp Monster" Webster, in a non-title affair.

The 31-year-old Lancastrian has been in full-time training since turning professional five years ago and has gained the

respect of her male sparring partners at the gym run by her coach, Tex Woodward. "She's trained very well," he said. "But this is a dangerous opponent. I am expecting her to win but she will have to be at the top of her game or there could be a problem."

The British boxing fraternity remains lukewarm to female boxers but, should tonight's affair fulfil its potential, it will help the women's game establish a degree of credibility that has been lacking thus far.

Maier keen to beat the snow

THE MEN'S World Cup super-G originally scheduled to take place tomorrow in Garmisch-Partenkirchen has been moved forward to today because of changing weather conditions.

The men's downhill, which is due to be run today, is in doubt because of recent heavy snow and rain. The super-G can be staged because it requires no training run; the downhill cannot be held without training and so far that has been impossible.

Hermann Maier, returning to the mountain where his skiing adventure started two years ago, can expect another tough challenge from Norway's Lasse Kjus on the awesome Kandahar piste. It was in the Bavarian resort that former bricklayer Maier burst onto the scene, landing his first World Cup win in a super-G in 1997. He won again last year and is capable of making it three in a row.

Maier would also be hard to beat in the downhill if he could match the reckless run which earned him the title at the World Championships earlier

this month in Vail. The muscular Austrian's main rival in the Colorado Rockies turned out to be Kjus, who won silver in the downhill and shared the gold with Maier in the super-G.

The two must now fight on for the overall World Cup title and their battle looks set to go to the wire at the finals next month in Sierra Nevada, Spain. "It is easier to shine at World Championships than to win the World Cup," said Maier, eager to defend the crown he won last season. "The World Cup is special because the winner is the man who has been the best skier all winter."

With two rounds remaining before the finals — next week in Oberschwang, Germany, and next month in Kvitfjell, Norway — Kjus tops the overall World Cup standings with 1,089 points. Norway's Kjell Andre Aamodt, the 1994 champion, is in second place, 35 points behind, while Maier in third, a further point adrift.

Trinidad faces Olympian task on comeback

FELIX TRINIDAD ends a 10-month lay-off by risking his International Boxing Federation welterweight title against Pernell Whitaker, who has not fought in 16 months, in New York tonight.

The unbeaten Puerto Rican, hoping to set up a showdown with the World Boxing Council champion, Oscar de la Hoya, meets a challenger who missed out on the whole of 1998 after undergoing cocaine rehabili-

tation in a drug treatment centre — a year in which he also received a suspended sentence for reckless driving.

"There will be no excuses in this fight," Whitaker said. "I don't look back at 1998. This is 1999. I'm a more mature Pernell Whitaker, but the skills are still there. I know I'm going out. But I'm going to go out in style."

Trinidad, 26, has won all 33 of his professional bouts and stopped 29 opponents inside the

distance. But he has not fought since stopping the Republic of Congo fighter Mahenge Zulu in four rounds last April. Even with weight troubles, Trinidad remains confident, though.

"Every fighter wants to end a fight in the quickest way," Trinidad said. "I'll hit him with the first punch, then I will try to end the fight. He's still a good boxer, but the drugs and alcohol have taken their toll, but Whitaker still has pride. He's a

little bit slower, but he's still strong. He has experience." Whitaker, 35, has won six world titles in four different weight classes and carries a 41-1 record and 17 knock-outs into a fight where he claims to feel in the same prime form that brought him Olympic gold in Los Angeles 15 years ago.

"If I had any rust, it was taken care of in training," Whitaker said. "Right now I feel like I want to go for the gold again."

Promoter Don King hopes to arouse De la Hoya's ire to face the Trinidad-Whitaker winner rather than his scheduled foe, fellow-American Oba Carr, or a possible rematch with Ike Quartey after De la Hoya's split-decision loss to the Ghanaian in Las Vegas a week ago.

"We're talking about Oscar de la Hoya's talent, his guts, his machismo," King said. "He cannot live with himself if he does not meet this challenge."

SPORTING DIGEST

ATHLETICS

GREAT BRITAIN TEAM (for short-term) match, 24 Feb (Mon) 6:00. K Williams (4-11), 200m. C Malcolme (4-11), 400m. A Laidlaw (4-11), 800m. R Ewing (4-11), 1500m. R Ewing (4-11), 5000m. R Ewing (4-11), 10000m. R Ewing (4-11), 20000m. R Ewing (4-11), 40000m. R Ewing (4-11), 80000m. R Ewing (4-11), 160000m. R Ewing (4-11), 320000m. R Ewing (4-11), 640000m. R Ewing (4-11), 1280000m. R Ewing (4-11), 2560000m. R Ewing (4-11), 5120000m. R Ewing (4-11), 10240000m. R Ewing (4-11), 20480000m. R Ewing (4-11), 40960000m. R Ewing (4-11), 81920000m. R Ewing (4-11), 163840000m. R Ewing (4-11), 327680000m. R Ewing (4-11), 655360000m. R Ewing (4-11), 1310720000m. R Ewing (4-11), 2621440000m. R Ewing (4-11), 5242880000m. R Ewing (4-11), 10485760000m. R Ewing (4-11), 20971520000m. R Ewing (4-11), 41943040000m. R Ewing (4-11), 83886080000m. R Ewing (4-11), 167772160000m. R Ewing (4-11), 335544320000m. R Ewing (4-11), 671088640000m. R Ewing (4-11), 1342177280000m. R Ewing (4-11), 2684354560000m. R Ewing (4-11), 5368709120000m. R Ewing (4-11), 10737418240000m. R Ewing (4-11), 21474836480000m. R Ewing (4-11), 42949672960000m. R Ewing (4-11), 85899345920000m. R Ewing (4-11), 171798691840000m. R Ewing (4-11), 343597383680000m. R Ewing (4-11), 687194767360000m. R Ewing (4-11), 1374389534720000m. R Ewing (4-11), 2748779069440000m. R Ewing (4-11), 5497558138880000m. R Ewing (4-11), 10995116277760000m. R Ewing (4-11), 21990232555520000m. R Ewing (4-11), 43980465111040000m. R Ewing (4-11), 87960930222080000m. R Ewing (4-11), 175921860444160000m. R Ewing (4-11), 351843720888320000m. R Ewing (4-11), 703687441776640000m. R Ewing (4-11), 1407374883553280000m. R Ewing (4-11), 2814749767106560000m. R Ewing (4-11), 5629499534213120000m. R Ewing (4-11), 11258999068426240000m. R Ewing (4-11), 22517998136852480000m. R Ewing (4-11), 45035996273704960000m. R Ewing (4-11), 90071992547409920000m. R Ewing (4-11), 180143985094819840000m. R Ewing (4-11), 360287970189639680000m. 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Henman out of touch in Kucera win

AFTER A match plagued with inconsistent strokes by both players, Tim Henman overcame the Slovakian Karol Kucera 6-4, 7-6 in their quarter-final meeting at the World Indoor Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam yesterday.

The British No 1 won an early break to lead 3-2 and then wrapped up the opening set 6-4 with his third ace of the afternoon, winning in just 43 minutes. He battled back from a 4-1 deficit in the second set to lead 5-4, only for Kucera to break back immediately to 5-5.

The Slovakian fell behind again after his ensuing service game, however, allowing Henman a chance to serve for the match. Henman moved into the driving seat with three match points but then extended a lifeline to Kucera who, after saving two match points, hit a blistering forehand that Henman could only volley into the net.

Two points later Kucera sent the set to a tie-break, hustling to his right on the baseline and passing Henman with another forehand as the Briton charged the net. Henman finally sealed his passage to the semi-final, breaking to lead the tie-break 6-4 before a Kucera lob sailed wide on the final point.

The Russian No 2 seed, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, started strongly in his match but surrendered the second set to the fierce attack of the Swiss youth world champion, Roger Federer, before emerging a 6-1, 5-7, 6-4 victor.

In Hanover, Venus Williams

TENNIS

BY DERBICK WHYTE
in Rotterdam

showed little mercy to Germany's Barbara Rittner, powering to a straight-sets win to advance to a semi-final showdown with Steffi Graf at the Faber Grand Prix.

Williams, seeded second, posted a 6-2, 6-1 rout of Rittner, a qualifier playing her sixth match of the £300,000 event. "I played very aggressively and went to the net," said Williams. "You have to do that if you want to be successful against Steffi."

The top-seeded Jana Novotna, of the Czech Republic, also advanced, recording a 6-1, 6-4 win over France's Sandrine Testud. The powerful Czech, who lost to Patty Schnyder of Switzerland in the final here last year, found her serve-and-volley game well suited to the quick indoor surface and gave Testud few chances to shine.

The match-up between the charismatic Williams, ranked sixth in the world, and No 7 Graf had been the one the German public wanted to see. Graf, who gained a hard-fought victory in her last meeting with the elder of the Williams sisters, was comfortable about her chances in today's match: "When I'm fit and can train well, then I can still beat the top players," said the German. "I have these circumstances here."

Germany's women's coach, Markus Schur, yesterday welcomed Graf's decision to return

to her country's Fed Cup team after a three-year absence. "I hoped there would be an agreement and I'm glad that it came so quickly," Schur said the day after the former world No 1 expressed her willingness to re-join the team.

Graf, currently seventh in the WTA rankings, helped Germany to a Fed Cup victory in 1987 and 1992. She will lead the German team when they meet Japan in Hamburg this April. The other singles player is likely to be Anke Huber.

Williams had no trouble against Rittner, a former Top 30 player, breaking her serve to take a 3-1 lead in both sets. The veteran German was forced to qualify because her rating has plummeted after an injury.

Williams expects a tougher match against Graf, 28, still struggling to regain her dominance in the women's game after a serious knee operation. "It will be very hard against her," Williams said. "I'm going to have to play aggressively and try to follow through on my strokes to make the points."

Spain's Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, who announced on Thursday that she would not be playing any Fed Cup matches for Spain this year, went one step further yesterday, announcing that she is to retire from the Fed Cup altogether.

The 27-year-old French Open champion, who has competed in the Cup for the past 13 years, said: "I want to have time to myself and be able to live my own life."

Results, Digest, page 26



Tim Henman shows the strain as he struggles to a 6-4, 7-6 win over Karol Kucera in Rotterdam yesterday AP

Leigh in for 'acid test' of fortunes

RUGBY LEAGUE

BY MICHAEL LATHAM

LEIGH'S NEW Australian coach, Ian Millward, faces what he calls an "acid test" of his team's revival in fortunes at Dewsbury tomorrow when the Northern Ford Premiership again takes centre stage.

"We've already got a couple of monkeys off our back," Millward said. "We won our opening league game, which was important for confidence after finishing bottom of the pile last year. Then we won at Barrow in the (Silk Cut Challenge) Cup, the first away win for 17 months. Another away win could really get things moving."

Dewsbury's coach Neil Kelly was dismayed by his side's Cup exit at Oldham last Monday. "But it's early days and eventually the cream usually rises to the top," says Millward. "Dewsbury were a top three side last season and this year I expect them, Hull KR and Widnes to go strongly."

Widnes face a stiff test of their title credentials at the Recreation Ground where the former Kiwi Test player Kevin Tamati, Whitehaven's new coach, has his side playing in the uncompromising fashion which marked his own playing career. "Once my players understand what I am after, they will do well," promises Tamati.

Hull KR, the championship favourites, are expected to be unchanged against a miserly Batley side that kept Oldham scoreless in the opening league game and then kept out the Super League newcomers Wakefield Trinity for the opening 46 minutes of last week's Cup tie. Gary Barnett, the influential Batley scrum-half, returns after injury.

Bramley's latest signing, the Papua New Guinea half-back Tom O'Reilly, is set to feature at some stage when Keighley visit Huddersley. Bramley's player-coach Mike Ford also drafts in recent recruits Maeda David and Danny McAllister into his starting line-up.

David Plange, Hunslet's coach, has signed a new two-year contract and should celebrate with a win against a Workington side mauled 52-0 at Bradford in the Cup. Latham Tawhai returns for Hunslet.

Ray Barford, a 29-year-old prop forward who has represented the New Zealand Maoris, is expected to make his Barrow debut at Rochdale, while Lancashire Lynx travel to unchanged York without the injured forwards John Donno and Neil Mawdsley.

Swinton, plagued by injuries and 78-4 losers at Huddersfield in the Cup, face a difficult trip to resurgent Doncaster.

Dagne's race against time

ATHLETICS

BY MIKE ROWBOTTOM

for the remaining five places in the team alongside Radcliffe that none of the women can feel entirely safe in missing the race. Among the most promising challengers, on paper, is Birhan Dagne, the Ethiopian who is currently in the process of applying for British citizenship. But Dagne, who has already represented Britain in the Ekiden relay event, has been suffering for a week from suspected food poisoning and will have to make a late decision on whether she can run.

Storey, her coach, is half resigned to her dropping out, al-

though he would prefer her to run if possible. "We can stand and talk to each other and still not understand what each other is saying, but she looks a bit iffy for the race," he said. There are doubts also about the participation of the Scottish pair of Hayley Haining and Vikki McPherson, but the expected presence of Heather Hearn, the North of England champion Jayne Spark, Lucy Elliott, Lucy Wright, Tara Kravits, Sonia McGeorge and Commonwealth medallist Andrea Whitcombe should ensure a close run thing. It is this depth of ability that helped the women bring back the team bronze from last year's World Championships in Marrakesh.

Two leading men will be absent from Nottingham - the reigning champion Keith Cullen, who has a knee injury, and the former European champion, Jon Brown, who, like Radcliffe, is preparing on the other side of the Atlantic for the World Championships, which take place in Belfast on 27-28 March.

The World Championship format introduced last year, which includes shorter races, means that 12 teams will be announced by the selectors after today's racing. The method used is identical - six selections, with the first three past the post taking automatic places, and the other places being given on a discretionary basis.

Christie to take part in Australian handicaps

LINCOLN CHRISTIE is to run in two races in Australia over the next two months. The former Olympic champion will take part in the Botany Bay Gift race in Sydney tomorrow with a metre handicap from Darren Campbell. He is also a confirmed starter for the Stawell Easter Gift in Melbourne in March.

The Stawell promoter, John Tolesman, said it was a coup for the historic 120 metres sprint. "It will probably be the last chance for Australians to see one of the best sprinters of all time," he said. "The only proviso rather than rely on individual countries operating their own

Namibia's Frankie Fredericks said yesterday that the International Olympic Committee should get its own house in order before lecturing athletes on the rights and wrongs of sports doping.

Fredericks, the world and Olympic silver medalist at 100 and 200m, said the IOC was in no position to take the moral high ground when it was embroiled in a scandal over the selection of Olympic sites.

On the eve of a meeting in Sydney, the venue for the 2000 Olympics, Fredericks asked: "I hope the IOC will clean up their house and get it in order

- because how can they tell us not to be cheats, to go and be clean, when they are doing all these dirty things?"

"I would like to see an independent body where the people who are testing us don't care about the Olympics," he added. "All they care about is to make sure that everybody competing is clean. If someone tests positive, they don't really care about what the number is, they don't care about what the name is. If it's a big name, it's a big name. If it's a small name, it's a small name. If somebody is positive, they are positive, they need to be punished."

Chaos in crowd after Tendulkar is run out

CRICKET

BY ABDUL KHAN
in Calcutta

Pakistan 185 & 316
India 223 & 214-6

tic bottles on to the field. Tendulkar had crashed into Shoaib Akhtar just as he was about to complete a third run and then narrowly failed to beat the substitute Nadeem Khan's direct throw from the boundary.

Television replays, called by umpire Steve Bucknor, indicated Tendulkar may have grounded the bat before he batted into Shoaib, but it was raised when the ball hit the wicket.

When the third umpire K T Francis rightly declared Tendulkar out because Shoaib had not collided deliberately with

the batsman, the crowd chanted "cheats, cheats" against the Pakistani fielder and threw missiles when he returned to the long-on fence.

The match referee Cammie Smith called the players off the field as security men immediately ringed the outfield and ball boys cleared the debris. Smith ordered an early tea break before play resumed and Tendulkar went on a walkabout in the crowd. "It was very good for Sachin to agree to our request to pacify the crowd," said police chief Dinesh Vajpai.

Yesterday's disturbance revived memories of the World Cup semi-final on the same ground in 1996 when Sri Lanka eventually beat India on default after a riot ended play with the hosts on the brink of defeat.

Scoreboard, Digest, page 26



Sachin Tendulkar appeals for calm in Calcutta Reuters

Storm to appeal over bans

BASKETBALL

BY RICHARD TAYLOR

abandonment of their game at Chester Jets three weeks ago. The appeal will be heard on Thursday.

The Storm general manager, Tony Ironmonger, said: "We are appealing against the length of the bans. A lot of factors are working against us, but we have got to fight all the harder for them."

"They were a credit to the club at Leicester," he added. "York, in particular, took a real battering but he just got on with the game."

Williams and Alderson are set for their final game of the season against Sheffield

Sharks at Moorways tonight, before the League takes a 10-day break to accommodate England's European Championship fixtures against Belarus and Israel, and next Saturday's All Star game.

After that, Derby have only five games before the Uni-Ball final, so the bans against Williams and Alderson would have to be more than halved for them to play.

Without their joint leading scorers, Derby will be the rank outsiders for the final against Manchester, who are the only team still challenging Sheffield for the league title.

Neville Austin, of Thames Valley Tigers, has been added to the England squad for next week's games.

England held up by captain Englefield

NEW ZEALAND took the honours on the second day of the third and final Under-19 Test against in Alexandra yesterday.

Replying to England's 286 all out, New Zealand, who need to win the match to level the series, were just 61 runs behind with six wickets in hand by the close.

But the Kiwis still have some way to go on a very flat pitch to get into a winning position. The opener Tim McIntosh and the captain Jarrod Englefield, did their best, adding 113 for the

England Under-19 295
New Zealand Under-19 234-4

second wicket before McIntosh skied a catch to Richard Logan off Richard Dawson.

Englefield, who has been out of form in this series, was dropped by Marc Symington when he was on 22 and went on to make 69 before being bowled off an inside edge by Joe Tucker.

Left-arm spinner Graeme Bridge took the fourth wicket when he trapped Brad Patton leg before for 12.

Earlier in the day, England's tail had failed to wag after they resumed on 272 for 7. Symington and Logan were out to poor shots and England were all out before the first hour had ended.

Second day of four
England Under-19 won toss

ENGLAND UNDER-19
First innings
(Overseas: 272 for 7)

M J Symington c McGlashan b Shaw 44
R J Logan c Gillespie b Shaw 44
116 A Wallace not out 116
G Bridge b Shaw 4
Barnes (87, w, nb) 18
Total (118.4 overs) 272
Fall (overs): 8-278, 9-284
Bowling: Shaw 21.4-5-54-4, Gillespie 18.5-7-1-1, Franklin 11.5-5-25-2, McNamee 4.1-11-0, Martin 35.1-4-49-2, Jansen 29.4-6-6-1.

NEW ZEALAND UNDER-19
First innings

T McIntosh c Logan b Dawson 71
M Pappas c Wallace b Tucker 25
J Englefield b Tucker 69
B Patton bow b Bridge 12
J McNamee not out 30
Franklin not out 10
Barnes (87, lb, w, nb) 17
Total (for 4, 85 overs) 234
Fall: 1-47, 2-160
To bats: M Gillespie, B Jansen, JP McGlashan, B Martin, H Shaw, Bowling: Butcher 13.1-38-0, Logan 14.4-18-0, Dawson 28.4-40-1, Tucker 8.1-29-2, Symington 8.1-29-0, Bridge 13.2-31-1, Gough 1-0-3-0, Umpires: K Barber and J Fenwick.

■ The head of Britain's anti-doping program has warned the cricket authorities they would be naive if they thought

the sport did not have a drugs problem. Michele Verokken, director of UK Sports Council's program, said the International Cricket Council should have its own worldwide testing system rather than rely on individual countries operating their own.

"You don't know you have a problem until you actually try and assess whether the problem exists," Verokken said, reacting to reports that the ICC does not plan to bring in drug testing at the World Cup in England in May and June.

CANNOCK, WHO took over the Premier leadership last weekend from Canterbury, play host to the Kent side tomorrow in the day's top fixture. Although both teams appear likely to qualify for the end-of-season top four play-offs, the match is likely to be fiercely contested.

The Cannock and Wales manager, Martin Gibbby, agrees that the game might be something of a Welsh trial, with both teams liberally sprinkled with Welsh internationals and Canterbury are handled by the Welsh national coach, David Bunyan. Gibbby has injury doubts about three of his squad - Michael Johnson, Jimmi Lewis and Kalbir Takhar.

"We want to win the League and the play-offs but we are taking it one game at a time," he said. Speaking of the play-offs, all games of which, except the final, will be played at Reading, he added: "Although I have nothing against Reading, I find the decision to play there unbelievable. It compounds everything that is wrong about the play-offs." It is a view expressed by other potential play-off sides, both men and women, who feel that there should have been an opportunity to play for home advantage.

HOCKEY
BY BILL COLWILL

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Third-placed Southgate travel the short distance to Chigwell to face Old Loughtonians, who in last weekend's double head-

er had odd goal wins against East Grinstead (6-4) and Canterbury (6-5). Southgate's Australian coach Neil Hawgood will be looking for consistency and full commitment.

Surbiton, the Division One leaders, will hope to consolidate their position away at Loughborough before they lose the services of their four South African internationals.

Reading are in good spirits after two matches in the European Indoor Club Championship in Prague. After their first game with the Russian club Dinamo Ekaterinburg ended 4-4, they beat Croatian club HK Maraton 10-3, goals coming from Mark Pearn (4), Jon Slay (3), Andrew Todd, Mark Hoskin and Scott Ashdown.

سكنا من الامم



THE SWEEPER

BY CLIVE WHITE AND NICK HARRIS



Believer Brown's eternal optimism

IT WOULD appear that Glenn Hoddle was not the only British Isles national coach to believe in spiritual matters. Craig Brown is also a believer – though not in reincarnation. Indeed the Scotland coach even gave a sermon last summer, prior to the World Cup finals, at Hillhead Baptist Church in Glasgow when he read from the Old Testament book of Exodus – appropriate enough given the Scots' early departure from France.

His theme, on which he spoke for three-quarters of an hour, was "The Worship of False Gods", which must also have met with some accord from among football fanatics among the congregation.

Unlike Hoddle, much less, say, Rene Simoes – the Jamaica coach who walks around in a "Jesus Saves" T-shirt – Brown, however, does not publicise his beliefs. As he says: "To be honest, I would never bang on about it, but if asked I'd place myself within the tradition of the Christian faith. I work most Sundays which is a terrible excuse, but I'd like to be more spiritually active than I am."

When he is engaged on the subject, Brown, who in his time has been a journalist, a headmaster and a college lecturer, as well as a combative footballer for Dundee, makes rather more sense than a certain person. He says: "In a book I was reading recently I came across a comment regarding all of life's ambitions about people 'finding that when they get there, there is no there'. I've seen many people, not just in football, climb the peaks of achievement only to feel flat, so maybe the only 'there' is the eternal."

out predecessor. A colleague with time to kill before Keegan's press conference on Thursday stumbled across the duet, *Diamond Lights*, by Glenn (Hoddle) & Chris (Waddle), in a second-hand record shop. It had been knocked down from £2.50 to £1.50 to £1.

INSTEAD OF painting a rosy picture of England's future to the media on Thursday, Keegan's time might have been better spent putting himself in the picture vis-a-vis the Polish threat to England's European

player and certainly all the pro-McManaman comments have come from the president, Lorenzo Sanz, rather than the Dutch coach. It is a well-known fact that coaches who have signed players on free transfers – as with the Liverpool player – are under less pressure to field them than those signed for many millions. Even the player himself has admitted that his role in the side has not yet been defined. Nevertheless, the smart money is on Hoddle leaving the European champions before McManaman does.

CONTRARY TO expectations, the Football Association's snappy decision to re-play last week's FA Cup tie between Arsenal and Sheffield United because of the unsporting manner in which the Gunners' "winner" was scored, has been favourably received world-wide. Giannaria Visconti, executive vice-president of Internazionale (and nephew of the famous film director), rang David Dein, the Arsenal vice-chairman, after hearing of the FA's decision to tell him: "It could only happen in England. Here, our federation would take 18 months just to discuss what to do next." It seems that our hitherto dilatory governing body is now a trail blazer.

THE REPUBLIC of Ireland, who have been heavily criticised for their decision to take Robbie Keane to the World Youth Championship in Nigeria in April, causing him to miss six of Wolves' promotion games, has received support from an unlikely Midland source. Alan Thompson, the Aston Villa midfielder, reckons that young players like his own team-mate Gareth Barry (who has been excused from that championship by the English FA) are being subjected to too much pressure at a young age and that participation in events like the Nigeria one are much more beneficial at this stage of their careers.

Thompson, who competed for England in the same event seven years ago in Australia, said: "I had a great time. I am sure it would have done Gareth a lot of good to have got away and had some international experience. Youngsters getting into first teams at such a young age (17) is a change which is creeping up on us."

SONG SHEET

Chelsea fans' funny Italian dance chant

"D', he's delightful,
'I', he's incredible,
'M', he's majestic,
'A', he's athletic,
Fooooo, E. O.
D', Matt-e-o,
Soooooooo."

Tune: D.I.S.C.O

Championship hopes. Had he taken himself a few miles down the A3 to Kingsmeadow Stadium he would have been able to watch a leading Polish club, Widzew Lodz, play Kingstonian.

The visitors, who are on a short pre-season tour of the country, included three full internationals among others in their side who could well be taking the field at Wembley on 27 March. Widzew, who were leading scorers in their country last season, won 3-1.

IT IS rumoured that Steve McManaman – whom, it is reckoned, Keegan will bring in from the cold – has been acquired by Real Madrid not so much to play as to be sold. The fact that the Spanish giants are £130m in debt may have something to do with the latest gossip doing the rounds in the capital. It has been said that Guus Hiddink does not want the

AS YOU WERE



WHEN WALTER SMITH got married in 1971 (above), it was surely one of his happiest moments, not to mention the start of an enduring success, as the celebration of his silver anniversary three years ago showed. When Walter took over at Everton (left) and saw his side score three goals in 13 home games he surely must have had doubts. But good things come to those who wait, as they say, and hey presto! Everton 5 Boro 0.

THE PRICE IS RIGHT



ANOTHER TREBLE up (paying £20) last Saturday and it would have been £146 if a strawberry blond Italian who, let's face it, with a haircut like that, is just begging to be deported, hadn't scored that clearly offside header half an hour into injury time against Sheffield Wednesday. Arsenal (home to Leicester) Blackburn (home to Sheffield Wednesday) and Liverpool (home

to West Ham) look home banker material and merit inclusion in some four-folds with Coventry to hold Manchester United to a draw and Southampton to gain a draw against Newcastle. Aston Villa can gain a draw with Wimbledon on Murdochvision tomorrow but, if you want to see some real class, watch Lazio take Internazionale's poor defence apart on Channel 4. Finally, let's add Blackburn to our FA Cup portfolio.

THE SWEEPER'S BLOND HIGHLIGHTS

LIBERO WAGERS

(Five £2 four-folds with Stanley): Arsenal to beat Leicester (1-2); Blackburn to beat Sheffield Wednesday (5-6); Coventry to draw with Manchester United (12-5); Liverpool to beat West Ham (8-15); Southampton to draw with Newcastle (12-5).

SUNDAY SKY MATCH

Wimbledon v Aston Villa Draw (£2, 9-4, Ladbrokes).

FA CUP ANTE-POST PORTFOLIO

Blackburn (£1, 12-1, William Hill, Ladbrokes & Tote).

SUNDAY CA ITALIAN JOB

Lazio v Internazionale Lazio (£2, 10-11, William Hill).

ORIGINAL BANK: £100.

CURRENT KITTY: £171.89!

TODAY'S BETS: £16.35 (inc. tax).

MASCOT ON THE MAT

Name: Captain Canary.

Club: Norwich City.

Appearance: A yellow bird with large feathers who wouldn't hurt a fly.

Crime sheet: The Captain may lead a relatively crime-free life, but he's made the mistake of falling in love with Camilla Canary, a trouble-

some tabby who has had the audacity to ruffle the hair of Norwich's most famous patron (saint), Della Smith. Not only has the Captain fallen in love with Camilla – despite her treasonable offence against the nation's No 1 egg boiler – but worse, he committed the sick-making gesture of presenting his new bird with a bouquet of roses recently.

In mitigation, Your Honour: Described by his club as a bit of a "Twetie Pie", Captain Canary would rather entertain the fans at Carrow Road than give Splat the Cat, his feline tormentor, the bird. The Captain tosses pancakes for charity, switches on Christmas trees, and loves children. Ahhh.

Other information: The Captain is a peace-loving compassionate canary, who once offered the hand of friendship to Wolfe, the Wolves mascot, but was promptly bitten on the neck. Reports that Wolfe was sick afterwards due to saccharine overload have not been confirmed.

Joe Morris



MY TEAM



DAVID MELLOR
CHELSEA

Task Force chairman, broadcaster, writer "I grew up in Dorset with no big team nearby and precious little football on television. I had no allegiance until I moved to London and lived a stone's throw from Stamford Bridge. At the end of the 70s the racism and violence got so bad I went across to Fulham for a while but when Ken Bates came on board in the 80s, and being an MP in a reasonably adjacent constituency (Putney), I came back. The absolute best moment was the Cup-Winners' Cup win in Stockholm – when the present team showed it matched the team of the 70s. And then winning four trophies in just over 12 months. There are a few dark horse title contenders but only three prime candidates – Manchester United, Arsenal and Chelsea."

IN T'NET

Found on the Web: Magic Celtic moments

The prospect of Celtic beating Internazionale in a European final these days is less remote than Dumbarton's chances of winning the Premier League in Scotland within the next five years. But for all those who like to live in the past and remember the days when the Bhoys really were the Continent's top dogs, the official Celtic site has a video and audio library which includes, amongst other things, Steve Chalmers' winning goal in the European Cup final in 1967, John Hughes' diving header against Leeds in the semi-final of the European Cup in 1970, and Tommy Gemmell's goal from the final the same year. The site as a whole is as comprehensive as any, with up to date news, match reports, ticket information and links to other Celtic sites around the world.

<http://www.celticfc.co.uk/>

SEEN BUT NOT BOUGHT

HAVING PERUSED the Celtic site (above) and spent some time reminiscing on the past, there can be few better ways for supporters to spend £7 than go to the club shop and splash out on a box of Celtic Gentlemen's Handkerchiefs. Green and white, and tastefully embroidered with "Celtic" and a shamrock, they are the perfect receptacle for tears.

THEY'RE NOT ALL DENNIS BERGKAMP

Unsung foreign

legionnaires No 27

RICARDO COSTA: The

20-year-old pint-sized Portuguese

midfielder started his career with

Porto in his native country before

moving on to Boavista and then, last

month, to Third Division Darlington

as a trialist. Obviously not a fan of

the English weather, he has already

raised eyebrows at Feethams by

wearing gloves (the first Quakers

player to do so, apparently) but has

rescued himself from any possibility

of deprecatory banter by his

performances on the pitch. "He's a

left-sided midfielder and a nippy

winger," a club spokesman said.

Costa has made three substitute

appearances so far. On his home

debut, two weeks ago against

Mansfield, the speedy youngster

scored a 90th minute goal to crown

his side's thumping 5-1 win and help

them climb to 12th in the table.



Staying ahead of the game at Madame Tussaud's

THERE IS only one true barometer of fame: Madame Tussaud's. If you're one of the 400 dummies on show, you're in the loop. Beyond lies the abyss to which has-beens are consigned. Or at least the head room. In *Modern Times: Warworks of the Rich and Famous* (BBC2, Wednesday), assorted celebs ruminated on being in with the wax crowd – and what it feels like when your time is up.

The programme was particularly cruel to Geoffrey Boycott, who was removed following his recent run-in with the French legal system. "Do you know what happens when you're deselected?" the interviewer asks him. "Deselected?" he replies. "Is that a political term or diplomatic term? What you mean is they melt them down and use them again."

CHRIS MAUME

SPORT ON TV



"They don't actually do that," she tells him, slightly hesitantly. "They beat them." "Ah, that's not very nice," he says, looking hurt. The camera pans across the shelves of severed heads: Nureyev next to Krushchev Frost smuggled up to Hope, Davis Jr whispering sweet nothings to Cilla Black, Tom Baker and Megalos the Cactus locked into a fierce staring contest, Goering and Laurence Olivier wondering what they've done to deserve

each other. Gagarin, Ann of Bohemia... and Boycott. As the camera moves up his face he looks deeply offended by his fate. "Oh, thank you very much," he says when told his head is still on the shelf. "Like Henry VIII, is it? Locked up all his wives' heads and put them in a corner, or a cupboard. Thank you very much." It's not clear whether he's being serious or sarcastic.

There is a star chamber that meets in secret to decide who's in and who's out. For every newcomer, someone must die. Fame's like that. After vigorous lobbying from the women on the staff, Michael Owen gets the nod, though we don't find out who he replaced. And the other big news is that Paul Gascoigne, still trapped inside his, er, sveit 1990 guise, needs a major

refit. Terry Venables is still there, down in what they call the Garden Party. "Oh no," he says when told he's next to Gazza. "Can't I even have a bit of peace and quiet in there?"

Venables evinces weird views when reflecting on the ceruminous afterlife. Beyond the shelves of heads there is somewhere even worse, beyond public view. The cupboard. "That's how life normally is at the end, isn't it?" he chuckles. "You go in a big cupboard." You'll never be England manager again with ideas like that, Terry.

Speaking of dummies, the less fortunate among you may, for reasons probably best kept to yourself, have been up at 6.30 on Saturday mornings watching BBC's digital venture News 24, whose domestic terrestrial viewing figures have ap-

parently numbered, ooh, in the dozens. For some misguided reason they wheel on a hack to discourse on the weekend sport, and one of their regulars is Chris Maume, usually described as "Sports Editor of the Independent", which is a laugh (I'm told he corrected the error the first time he was on but has strangely failed to on subsequent appearances). When I taped his performance last Saturday he was on his usual gabbling form.

Generally, when the camera alights on his ashen, wax, lifeless face he obviously sees himself on the monitor and realises with a horrid shock that he has all the vim and vigour of a body recently dragged from the Thames and hurriedly dried out. The insane grin he quickly adopts doesn't come close to compensating for the sense of

impending rigor mortis. Then, once he opens his mouth, sense gives in without a fight and is borne out of the studio on his prodigious wafts of hot air.

Fortunately for him, he usually has the patient and amiable David Robertson leading him by the hand through the headlines. A curious and irritating feature of Maume's style is his habit of talking over the questions – "Yes. Yes. Yes. Right. Yes. No, that's right. Yes. Yes. Absolutely" as if Robertson needs the coaxing rather than himself. Shut it! I wanted to scream at the screen (in fact, did scream at the screen).

Robertson kicked off with the Charlton floodlights affair, Maume's contribution amounting mainly to the fact that match-fixing is "systematic and endemic" in the Far East (thanks for that) and that one

of the most threatening aspects is how "we're being infiltrated in such a directly invasive manner." How utterly fascinating.

Desperate to claw back credibility he attempted to convey an air of authority over the England succession issue. "My information is that [Keegan] can be wooed," he said at one point – "my information" consisting mainly of what his newspaper had printed that morning. Well, at least he can read.

Maume must also learn to keep his hands to himself. Clearly believing that if you wave them round enough, people won't listen to what you're saying, he came on all Magnus Pike – to the apparent accompaniment of gunfire as he slapped his microphone at one stage.

As they say down Television Centre, don't give up the day job.

Everton intent on displaying hidden talents

FIRST, AN apology. In recent weeks these columns might have implied watching Everton was akin to watching paint peel and that only those with long pockets, tedious lives or severe inclinations towards self-harm would pay money to gain entrance to Goodison Park.

It has since been brought to our attention that the team is brimming with entertainers, their strikers can shoot straight and that they are dripping with goals. We apologise for any misunderstanding our earlier comments may have caused.

There, you never expected to read that this season, and even Everton's most blue-eyed supporter must be fearing that the events of the past eight days are a mirage in a desolate

BY GUY HODGSON

desert of scoreless draws but, if ever a team illustrated that a week in politics is considerably shorter than one in football, they have.

Seven goals (two in the FA Cup, five against Middlesbrough) have transformed the mood in half of Merseyside and Everton travel to Leeds today in hope rather than trepidation of scoring successive wins in the Premiership for the first time since January last year.

"Defensively, we've been quite solid as a unit, especially at home," their goalkeeper, Thomas Myhre, said, "but we've not scored many goals. We've needed a bit of fortune to get the right result. Our players

are good enough not to be in the position in the table we're in."

The transformation has come partly due to the abandonment of the over-rigid 3-5-2 formation that too easily led to five men at the back, and to the re-emergence of Nick Barmby. He has scored four goals in Everton's last five games and, operating on the left, is alternatively drifting to bring much-needed width or even more desired striking options. "His form over the last few games has been tremendous," Walter Smith, his manager, said of a player who has not always justified his £5.75m fee. "He is now performing to his full potential."

Barmby's last two goals were against his former club Middles-

brough, who are falling so fast that they are every bit as anxious as clubs far below them. Today they meet Tottenham at the Riverside in a match proving that attitude rather than points can be more important.

Spurs are a point behind today's opponents, but whereas their season appears to be on the up on the back of reaching the Worthington Cup final Boro, who have not won so far this year, are becoming increasingly gloomy.

"We had a fantastic start to the season," their goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer said, "but we've slipped after his one-match ban but his manager, Arsène Wenger, was so impressed by Nwankwo Kanu on his Premiership debut that he sudden-

ly has an embarrassment of riches up front. "You could see from the start that Kanu has a great talent," he said. Bergkamp on the bench? It could happen.

Manchester United travel to Coventry and a ground which gave Alex Ferguson an unhappy end to 1997. His team were leading 2-1 with four minutes to go when Darren Huckerby took flight to earn the Sky Blues an unlikely 3-2 win. This time United arrive at Highfield Road with an 11-match unbeaten run and with the potential to use Ryan Giggs again as he returns from a hamstring injury. "The team is playing well and the spirit is great," Ferguson said. "It's just a matter of getting our heads down and concentrating."

Spare a thought for Coventry's Bosnian centre-back Muhamed Konic, who made his full debut against a rampant Alan Shearer in a 4-1 defeat at Newcastle and now faces the prospect of Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke, who have the little matter of 40 goals between them. And someone told him it was easy money in the Premiership...

Ron Atkinson would not agree with that. Nottingham Forest were massacred 8-1 by United two weeks ago and the team they face today are the second highest scorers on their travels, Chelsea. A Forest win against the Premiership's second-placed side is unlikely. But impossible? When Everton can score five, nothing is that any more.

McAllister points way to brighter future

Coventry City's inspirational leader is back to his best ready for the challenge of Manchester United today. By Phil Shaw

EVERYONE WITH even a passing interest in football has heard of the Hand of God. Many Scots revel in the pious indignation it provokes in the English and celebrate it in song. Gary McAllister, always his own man, is probably alone among his countrymen in having fonder memories of God's Finger.

No, it is not a sex aid, although people have been known to wax orgasmic beneath its erect form. Nor is it anything to do with the "It could be you" slogan, even if it is used in the build-up to a four-yearly international lottery. And there is no direct link with Diego Maradona.

God's Finger is actually a mountain near Rio de Janeiro, at the foot of which lies Brazil's World Cup training camp. McAllister was there last spring, pitch-side for the Channel Four programme *Planet Football*, gazing in awe as the likes of Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and a personal favourite, Rivaldo, trained for a friendly against Argentina and the forthcoming festival in France.

While he had progressed beyond the stage of feeling forlorn about the cruciate-ligament injury which had already ruled him out of the World Cup, it was nevertheless a fillip to McAllister's morale to be recognised by Rene Simoes, Jamaica's Brazilian coach. Moreover, the sagacious Simoes knew all about his knee problem and had some unusual advice.

"He's heavily into sports psychology," McAllister explains, "and he assured me that the physical side of my recovery wouldn't be a problem. It was the mental aspect I needed to concentrate on. He suggested that every night, I should close my eyes for 15 minutes and picture all the positive things I've done in matches: great goals and free-kicks, going past opponents, and so on.

So did you do it? "I told him," he replies, unable to stifle a laugh, "I'd need at least an hour for that." McAllister's response was the stoical humour of a player striving to keep his spirits up rather than conceit, but, whatever methods he used, Scotland's playmaker leads Coventry City today against the Premiership leaders, Manchester United, in arguably his best form since he left Leeds two and half years ago.

In the Sky Blues' last home game he dominated midfield in opposition to Liverpool's England partnership of Paul Ince and Jamie Redknapp. Last Saturday brought a deflating FA Cup exit at Everton, but McAllister scored with the kind of cunningly

flighted set-piece that would occupy his mind's eye for several minutes on the Simoes scale.

Defeat at Goodison Park left Coventry in the familiar position of having nothing to look forward to except the fight to protect their 32-year tenure in the top flight. Despite a further setback at Newcastle on Wednesday, McAllister is convinced they will survive. Not because they have always done so, but "because we're good enough", and because, in Darren Huckerby and Noel Whelan, they possess the attackers to score the requisite goals.

"I've played with some fantastic strikers - Eric Cantona, Tony Yeboah, Lee Chapman - but they were all relatively old. The exciting thing about Darren is that he's so young. There's no limit to what he could achieve.

"Snowy (Whelan) was the star of our juniors at Leeds when they beat Manchester United in the Youth Cup final and he stood out above the Beckhams and Scholes. He was

'To get the better of United you have to stand toe-to-toe and battle with big international players. Any sign of weakness and they'll go for it'

very versatile then. He's definitely a forward now, with real craft."

But McAllister is at a loss to explain why Coventry have failed to build on last season's mid-table finish. "At the start of the season I had high hopes of coming back in the autumn into a side that was flowing and well up the table. It didn't happen and I wish I knew why. People say that selling Dion (Dublin) can't have helped, but he was here for the first 15 games and we were in the bottom three or four then.

Even though Coventry needed the points, McAllister was not rushed back the way he might have been at some clubs. Gordon Strachan, the manager, trusted him to say when he felt ready. The respect is mutual, says the captain, though their relationship has changed since they played together for Leeds and Scotland.

"That goes without saying when a friend becomes your boss. We still talk about football things but we don't

really socialise. The other players wouldn't feel that was right, understandably."

McAllister believes that Strachan, who tends to be fiery where he is phlegmatic, is growing into the role. "Gordon certainly speaks his mind, but I've seen him count to 10 a few times lately in heated situations. Everyone says he wants us to play with the passion he shows, but that's the least he expects from us.

"His belief is that you may have special skills but you won't be able to show them unless you give maximum effort. Look at [Zinedine] Zidane for France against England last week. It might have looked as if he was walking about, but it wasn't a coincidence that every time he got the ball there was nobody near him. That was down to sheer hard graft."

McAllister, who was 34 on Christmas Day, harbours managerial ambitions of his own and has observed with particular interest the progress of another ex-colleague, David O'Leary, at Elland Road. "David always had his own ideas and was pretty shrewd. You don't last 20-odd years as a top-class defender by being naïve.

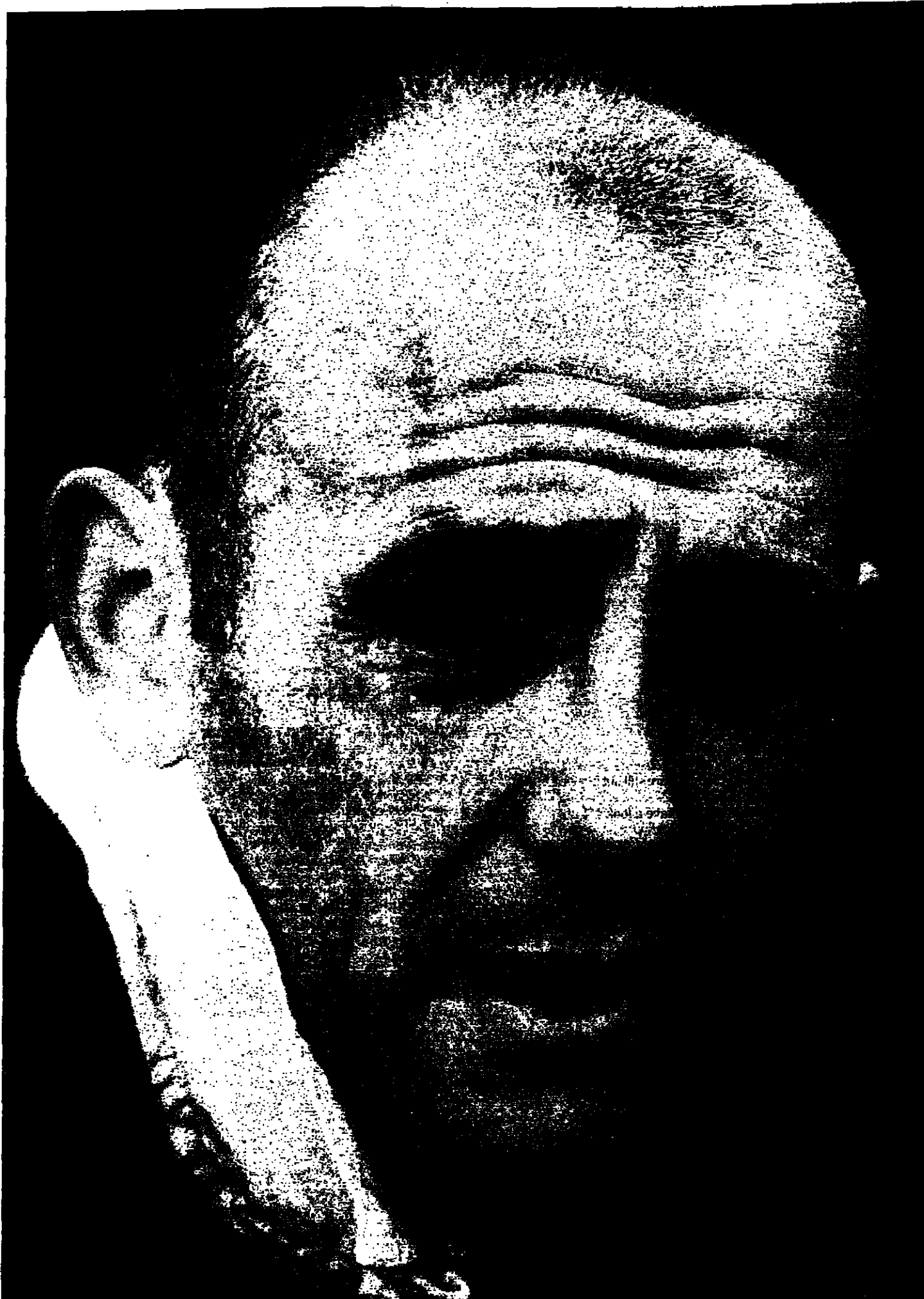
"If someone told me that my first job as a manager would be with Leeds United, I'd certainly be interested. I don't know where I'll start. But all I know is football and I want to stay in it. There's pressure, sure, but it's good pressure, not stress as I understand it."

He has become accustomed to Leeds fans booing him for his supposed betrayal of their club (though he points out that he twice declined moves when they tried to offload him and was prepared to stay for a salary far smaller than Coventry were offering); and, ironically, to being barracked by Manchester United's followers for helping the Yorkshire side pip them to the championship in 1992.

Curiously, McAllister could have been part of the Old Trafford set-up himself. From the age of 12 to 16, during the reigns of Dave Sexton and Ron Atkinson, he was promised to United. Every school holiday, he travelled from Bellshill - coincidentally, Sir Matt Busby's home town - to train with other wannabes such as Mark Hughes and Norman Whiteside.

"In the end, United came up to Lanarkshire to our house to tell me they weren't taking me," he remembers. "A nice way to deliver bad news, I suppose."

The route that led him to High-



Gary McAllister has recovered from his World Cup injury disappointment to find form with Coventry City

Rui Vieira

field Road has been strewn with epic battles with United and more than one famous victory. "To get the better of them you have to win the individual battles, stand toe-to-toe with big international players. In my case that means people like Paul Ince and then Roy Keane. Any sign of weakness and they'll go for it, but they're very enjoyable games."

McAllister, who views such en-

counters as ideal preparation for his anticipated return to the Scotland squad when the Euro 2000 qualifiers resume next month, is excited by the panache of Chelsea, whom he sees as a more resilient version of Kevin Keegan's Newcastle. Although he has also been impressed by the progress of Aston Villa and by the manager John Gregory's straight-talking style, he senses that the title

race will boil down to a struggle between United and Arsenal.

"I reckon United will win it, but themselves, Arsenal and Chelsea are playing a different game from the rest of us. Things have moved on since we finished top at Leeds seven years ago. You could win games through power and pace then. Now there's more sophistication."

United's front two, Dwight Yorke

and Andy Cole, combine all those attributes and more. McAllister, who believes the strike-force is the most important unit in any side, calls them "a midfielder's dream... the best pair in the country". Coventry have a mountain to climb, both today and in the months ahead, yet the man from God's Finger will be doing his utmost to point the way to brighter days on the Sky Blue horizon.

In the wake of omnipotent Brian

AS A seven-year old in the autumn of 1977, living in the comfortable Midlands suburb of Hounslow, being told (due to paternal work commitments) that we were going to relocate and start a new life in a new city was the most traumatic piece of news I have ever heard. The tectonic plates had shifted and the ground had opened up before me. With whom would I swap my Star Wars cards? Would they still show *The Six Million Dollar Man* on the strange planet (called Nottingham) I was moving to?

Although I recognised the new culture as close to my own, there was a fundamental difference in the belief system of the new species. The ubiquitous red and white scarves to stave off the cold (it is colder up north). A seven-year-old "Kenny Burns" tackling an eight-year-old "Tony Woodcock" in the playground. And then there was that higher being they worshipped in this new

FAN'S EYE VIEW

NOTTINGHAM FOREST
BY ADRIAN MCGREEVY

land, who was always on the television, in the papers, everywhere. This deity was easily recognisable - he was omnipotent after all - and his name was Brian Clough.

I remained nominally, thanks to avuncular influences, an Aston Villa supporter in my first few months in Nottingham, but after returning to Hounslow for a weekend visit my conversion finally took place, and when it came, it overpowered me. I was sitting in London, watching the League Cup final of 1978 and suddenly I was watching my city beat Liverpool,

thanks to the determination of a very young Chris Woods deputising for Peter Shilton. When we won the championship that season, my indoctrination was complete. Anyone for a nostalgic rendition of *We've got the whole world in our hands*?

Brian Clough was the greatest - no question. During his reign at Forest, except for the final year in charge (the relegation year, I tend to think of it now as a *Dallas*-esque dream sequence which should be erased from the history books in respect to the man), Liverpool and Forest were the only two teams to finish in the top half of the table every single year - every single year! That's consistency for you. That's 15 years on a budget that wouldn't pay for Duncan Ferguson's left toenail.

He made bad players mediocre, mediocre players good, good players very good, and very good players world-beaters. The list of players

who "failed" after leaving Forest is monumental, and most of them went to Manchester United (ha!) - Davenport, Birdie, Webb et al. Fundis talk of Roy Keane as the complete midfielder but anyone who saw him at the City Ground realises he isn't half the player now that he was when playing for us.

Every civilisation has to come to an end, but why did the destruction have to happen so suddenly at Forest? Forest, the jokey acronym (Fighting Off Relegation Every Saturday Teatime), Forest the yo-yo specialists. What's become of us? Ron Atkinson? Please! I suppose we'll have to wait another hundred (thousand) years for a similar civilisation to emerge in Nottingham. I suspect we might never see his like again and we will have to be content with worshipping a deity that has long since gone. I have my "Cloughie" prayer mat out already.

Kohler forced to quit

DAVID KOHLER is to step down as Luton Town chairman and leave the club after his home was threatened with a petrol bomb yesterday.

Kohler took over the club eight years ago but two relegations have seen Luton slump into the Second Division. Some fans have blamed him because of the club's policy of selling players to balance the books. They also complained that he was drawing a salary which the club could ill-afford to pay, having appointed himself managing director. He owns 52 per cent of the football club's shares.

Chairmen are coming increasingly into the firing line - the Port Vale chairman Bill Bell's car dealership was vandalised recently. More seriously, though, in the early hours of yesterday, a petrol bomb and matches were pushed through the letterbox of Kohler's home near St Albans. They were not ignited. "I've been involved with Luton Town for a quarter of my life and have

always tried my best to act in the interests of the club," Kohler said. "What happened is an act that any reasonable person must deplore. As a husband and father of three children, the youngest only five weeks old, my primary responsibility is to them. The police have viewed this petrol bomb as a warning. However, I am not prepared to use my family as a shield or place them in any circumstances that could endanger them."

The Blackburn Rovers manager Brian Kidd is to make an improved £4.5m offer for West Ham's captain Steve Lomas, with the possibility of a cash-plus-player exchange deal.

Kidd's need for the Northern Ireland international increased yesterday, with fears that Billy McKinlay may need groin surgery. The midfielder is to see a leading specialist and may require a long spell of rest.

The combative McKinlay had a hernia operation last summer after Scotland's World Cup campaign and

Kidd is worried about going into the vital final weeks without his services. Now Rovers will offer more cash to hasten the Lomas move. They may also try to exchange one of their strikers as an option - Nathan Blake or Kevin Davies could be sacrificed.

Dwight Yorke has applied for British citizenship but does not expect his new status to catapult him into Kevin Keegan's England side. The Trinidad and Tobago international says he wants to be a British national to save time at airports. The Manchester United striker is tired of lengthy check-ins when he returns from European trips with the Reds.

Trevor Francis's £2.5m move for the Crystal Palace pair of Lee Bradbury and Craig Moore has hit a snag because the players will have to take a pay cut. The Birmingham City manager is willing to pay the fee to cash-strapped Palace, but both Bradbury and Moore are on salaries above Birmingham's wage structure.



SPORT



MEET RUGBY'S ROLY POLY P22 • McALLISTER THE FEARLESS LEADER P30

Five Nations: England's No 10-elect can expect a storming Scottish welcome as he stakes claim for World Cup role

Wilkinson enters the cauldron

IF EVERYTHING goes to plan - and in Anglo-Scottish terms things have largely gone to plan for England from the moment Nigel Heslop scuttled over for a second-half try in Twickenham's south-west corner eight years ago - England will lay down two highly significant markers in retaining the Calcutta Cup for the umpteenth time this afternoon. They will establish themselves as odds-on favourites to win the 78th and final Five Nations' Championship and, in the process, unveil their outside-half for the real business of this calendar rugby year: the World Cup.

No, we are not talking Mike Catt here, although the Bath midfielder's high-octane versatility will pretty much guarantee him a place in the squad come October. The stand-off under debate - and he is very much a stand-off, regardless of the fact that he sports the No 13 shirt today - is Jonny Wilkinson, and at the risk of piling great steaming dollops of unwanted pressure on the poor petal, he is in the perfect position to bring all the recent "Stransky for England" but-

BY CHRIS HEWETT

foony to an early conclusion. Clive Woodward might easily have selected the 19-year-old wunderkind in his optimum role for this game; indeed, were he still locked into the "sweet bird of youth" mindset that marked his first nine months or so as national coach, he would almost certainly have done so. But Woodward has wised up since he fed Wilkinson to 15 Wallaby-shaped wolves in Brisbane last summer.

An outing at inside centre behind a pack well capable of dominating both possession and territory is a far more sympathetic method of introducing a future general to the ranks.

There is nothing new in the kid-glove theory of selection. The Australians did something very similar with the 20-year-old Michael Lynagh back in the early 1980s: snugly sandwiched between the great Mark Ella and the ever-dependable Andrew Slack, the maestro in waiting was afforded the privilege of learning the international ropes at his own speed while laying the foundations of

a kicking routine that would establish him as the most prolific points-gatherer in the history of Test rugby. As a centre, Lynagh contributed 44 points to the Wallabies' Grand Slam of Britain and Ireland in 1984. Within a year, he had moved into the green and gold No 10 on a very long lease.

Having over-hyped and over-faced Wilkinson last June, Woodward is understandably reluctant to make the same mistake twice. However, he still gets carried away whenever the Boy Wonder subject crops up in conversation.

"Even though he is still a teenager and starting a Five Nations match for the first time, we believe Jonny can cope with anything Scotland might throw at him," insisted the coach yesterday. "We're sure he can kick goals under pressure and, if the Scots target him to capitalise on his inexperience, we're confident he will cope with the ordeal."

Woodward's breathless enthusiasm was echoed by Jeremy Guscott, no less: "Jonny is a natural organiser; he's been telling us what to do all week," he said. Wilkinson was wearing short trousers to school and scurrying around the mini-rugby fields of his native south coast on a diet of orange squash and peanut butter sandwiches when the Bath legend made his first full Five Nations appearance for England, but there is no suggestion of any gung-ho apprentice arrangement. Guscott knows a good 'un when he sees one.

Much of the fascination of this afternoon's contest surrounds the rival middlefields, especially now that Gregor Townsend is back in his right-ful outside-half position to load the bullets and create the space for John Leslie to wreak his Otago-style havoc. In fact, Leslie represents a substantial threat to Wilkinson's equilibrium; the New Zealand south islander was good enough to



The England coach, Clive Woodward (wearing cap), gives a tactical briefing before today's big game at Twickenham. David Ashdown

ENGLAND v SCOTLAND	
at Twickenham	
N Beal.....Northampton	15 G Metcalfe.....Glasgow Cal
D Rees.....Sale	14 C Murray.....Edinburgh Reivers
J Wilkinson.....Newcastle	13 A Tait.....Edinburgh Reivers
J Guscott.....Bath	12 J Leslie.....Glasgow Cal
D Luger.....Harlequins	11 K Logan.....Wasps
M Catt.....Bath	10 G Townsend.....Brive
M Dawson.....Northampton	9 G Armstrong.....Newcastle, capt
J Leonard.....Harlequins	1 T Smith.....Glasgow Cal
R Cockerill.....Leicester	2 G Bulloch.....Glasgow Cal
D Garforth.....Leicester	3 P Burnell.....London Scottish
M Johnson.....Leicester	4 S Murray.....Bedford
T Rodber.....Northampton	5 S Grimes.....Glasgow Cal
L Dallaglio.....Wasps, capt	6 P Walton.....Northampton
N Black.....Leicester	7 M Leslie.....Edinburgh Reivers
R Hill.....Saracens	8 E Peters.....Bath

Replacements: 16 M Perry (Bath), 17 P Grayson (Northampton), 18 K Bracken (Saracens), 19 M Corry (Leicester), 20 D Greenwood (Saracens), 21 G Barmister (Leicester), 22 N McCarty (Glasgow)

Replacements: 16 S Longstaff (Glasgow Cal), 17 C Chalmers (Edinburgh), 18 I Fairley (Edinburgh), 19 A Ponnambalam (Northampton), 20 A Reed (Glasgow), 21 D Edrington (Bath), 22 S Brotherton (Edinburgh)

Referee: D McHugh (Ireland) Kick-off: 2.30 (Sky Sports 2)

impale Gavin Hastings' Lions on the rough end of the pineapple back in 1993 and if his performance against Wales a fortnight ago was anything to go by, he has lost none of his potency.

For all that, England are not so much worried about the 15 Scotsmen on the field as the

single tracksuited Borderer usually to be found prowling the touchlines. Jim Telfer knows more about this season's bouquet of red roses, from Jason Leonard in the front row to Nick Beal at full-back, than they know about themselves; on the 1997 Lions' tour of South Africa, he made

it his business to work his way into the hearts and minds of two-thirds of this English team and, like the proverbial elephant, he forgets nothing. "You don't have to remind me about the threat he poses," Lawrence Dallaglio, the English captain, said this week. "I have great respect for the

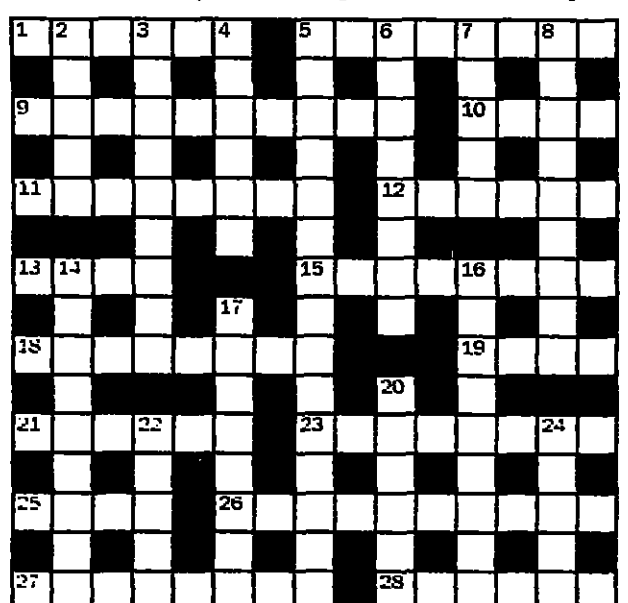
things Jim does with a rugby team; he puts great emphasis on getting the basics absolutely right and he demands intensity from his players. That victory over Wales a fortnight ago had Telfer stamped all over it."

By the same yardstick Telfer needs no reminding that England hold all the aces, particularly in the first phase areas of scrum and line-out. The Scots will play a quick game this afternoon; they will ruck like wild things and crawl over their white-shirted foe like a rash. But England will have the ball and, at this level, the ball counts for everything.

THE SATURDAY CROSSWORD

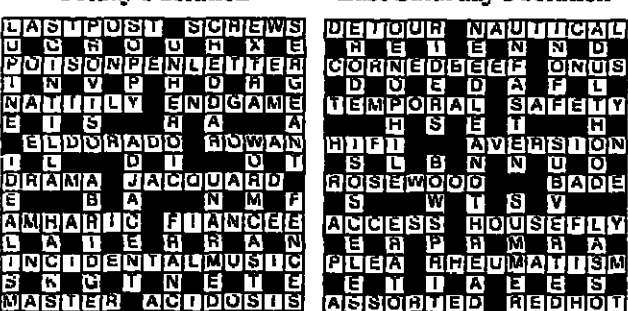
No.3851 Saturday 20 February

by Phi



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution



ACROSS

- 1 and 5 Friendly aspects of church helping the poor? (6,8)
- 9 Played a part - so need part to play? (10)
- 10 Wings of peered forming outer covering (4)
- 11 and 12 It's what one stands for in the country! (8,6)
- 13 Turkish commander trapping king in Indian town (4)
- 15 Excess love's to suffice in poetry (8)
- 18 Officially noted as working with tape (2,6)
- 19 Last of players remains in the band (4)
- 21 and 23 Handsome hero preparing to box rough-looking chancer (6,6)
- 25 Something offensive to the eye will be long out of fashion (4)
- 26 Rat microbe is destroyed as a result of some pressure (10)
- 27 and 28 Bare sculptress should be banded in floor covering (8,6)

DOWN

- 2 Vocal music - nothing given to piano over a long period (5)
- 3 This month I, in front of spectators, kick off (9)
- 4 Heather has taken in fashionable feature of winter coat (6)
- 5 Get back to sort out historic sports statistics? (6,3,6)
- 6 Embarrassed about theologian hanging round sleazy cafe (3,5)
- 7 One's head taking in parking information (5)
- 8 Teams taking on leaders in European soccer break for refreshment (9)
- 14 A source of power; information and inspiration used by King (6)
- 16 The writer getting into abuse of steroid equipment in medical cabinet? (9)
- 17 Extract of frogglove a blessing? It's easy to get hooked on (8)
- 20 Surface of road where river creature turns up (6)
- 22 Requirements observed to rise, after daughter's settled in (5)
- 24 Racket from boater enveloping one (5)

The first five correct solutions to this week's puzzle opened next Thursday receive hardbacked copies of the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. Answers and winners' names will be published next Saturday. Send solutions to Saturday Crossword, P.O. Box 404, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5BL. Please use the box number and postcode and give your own postcode. Last week's winners: M Holgate, Sevenoaks; A McArthur, Fleet; A Maguire, Monkstown; J Sheppard, Sutton; P Rovers, Tunbridge Wells.

FA to cast a wider net

FOOTBALL
BY CHRIS MAUME

WHEN THE Kevin Keegan era is done and dusted, the Football Association will not shrink from treading foreign shores to find his successor as England coach.

Senior sources at the FA gave strong indications yesterday that even if the best man for the job is not English, he will receive serious consideration. Of course, the men currently in charge at Lancaster Gate still hope to persuade Keegan to stay on.

The FA's acting chief executive, David Davies, not surprisingly found himself still defending the decision to employ Keegan as a stop-gap.

"In the circumstances, we had to give the players the best chance of qualifying for the Euro 2000 finals," he said. "We also believe that, come the end

of the season, the choice in terms of who to go for may be significantly wider than it is at this particular moment."

The obvious implication of that statement is that individuals have already been targeted but are under contract with assorted clubs.

Bryan Robson asked Keegan yesterday to come and watch Paul Gascoigne. Keegan's announcement that he would be welcomed back into the England fold during his reign was greeted favourably on Teesside.

"Obviously, that's a boost for Gazza," Robson said. "I think he's been playing well of late, and it's up to Gazza to keep play-

ing well - and then it's up to Kevin Keegan. Gazza's had a reasonable season for us and I think he's coming on quite strongly with his fitness and with his game, so I'd recommend Kevin that he should have a look at him."

John Toshack, whose reign as Wales manager was even shorter than Keegan's is likely to be in the England set-up, thinks Keegan will have a smoother ride during his four games in charge than Toshack did in his tenure.

Keegan's former Liverpool team-mate resigned after just one match in charge - a 3-1 home defeat by Norway - following a row with the Football Association of Wales.

"They had decided they were going to get rid of Terry Yorath

and they wanted me to replace him," Toshack said. "But my situation was a different kettle of fish to Kevin's. For a start I was in San Sebastian coaching Real Sociedad, so I was working a long way away from my players. I decided to give it a go for a period of time until they sorted somebody out, but once I saw the house from the inside I realised it was not particularly nice."

"With Kevin we're only talking about three months and four games, that's all. I don't think trying to do both jobs will affect him and he will probably bounce one off the other. He's more or less dictated what he wants from the FA and that's the kind of lad he is. Whatever he puts his mind to, you would not bet against him."

IN MONDAY'S 12-PAGE SPORTS SECTION

'With Battersea the next stop, Britain's No 2 knows he has to be back to his best'

JOHN ROBERTS ON GREG RUSEDISKI

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COMMENT • ARTS & BOOKS • COUNTRY & GARDEN • TRAVEL

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BLOOD ON THE
DANCEFLOOR**
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BY LEWIS
WOLPERT**
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**GLORIES OF
A GARDEN
IN SPRING**
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**THE TRAVEL
PHOTO OF
THE YEAR**
TRAVEL, PAGE 19

Flirting with the enemy



When is it acceptable to take tea with a 'war criminal'? Newly uncovered secret documents reveal that in 1949 the British government was prepared to break any moral barrier to save its retreating army in Palestine. Here was a ghostly prelude to 50 years of Arab/Israeli conflict...



Haj Amin Al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem
Corbis

After the Second World War, Palestine was crumbling. A "hell-disaster", Churchill called it. Menachem Begin's Irgun had blown up British headquarters at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the British were executing Jewish "terrorists", and the Jews had hanged two kidnapped British Army sergeants. The Arabs were determined to destroy the future Jewish state of Israel. The old imperial mandate was in a state of incipient civil war. You have only to open Colonial Office file 537/2643 to understand why, in their moment of agony, the British toyed with the idea of negotiating with an Arab cleric whom they had, only two years earlier, tried to extradite as a war criminal.

Indeed, in 1941 Haj Amin Al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, had been chatting to Hitler in Berlin, urging the Reich to prevent the departure of European Jews to Palestine; and two years later he had been helping to raise a Muslim SS battalion in Sarajevo to fight on the Russian front. Later on, claiming ignorance of the Jewish Holocaust, he told the German foreign minister Ribbentrop in 1944 that if Jews were to be "removed" from Germany, "it would be infinitely preferable to send them to other countries where they would find themselves under active control (sic), as for example, Poland..." When he attempted to flee Germany in 1945, the French captured the Grand Mufti, but allowed him to escape to Egypt. In 1947 he turned up in Lebanon as leader of the Palestinian Arabs, a powerful and influential voice that could pacify - or provoke - an

Arab uprising against Britain in its last days of rule in Palestine.

No wonder, then, that the old Colonial Office file was not released under the usual 30-year rule, but kept secret for half a century. Its contents - astonishingly, they were overlooked by historians on their release last month - speak not only of hidden contacts between the Grand Mufti and British diplomats in Cairo, but also of imperial despair in Palestine and, most dramatically, of outrage at Jewish "reprisals" against Arab civilians which constituted, according to the British High Commissioner, "an offence to civilisation". Indignation and fury permeate the file. So does defeat.

On 15 December 1947, Lieutenant General Sir Alan Cunningham sent a top secret memorandum

BY ROBERT FISK

to the British colonial secretary Arthur Creech-Jones, outlining the civil war in Palestine in fearful detail. "Situation now is deteriorating," he wrote, "into a series of reprisals and counter-reprisals between Jews and Arabs, in which many innocent lives are being lost, the tempo of which may accelerate... I have been considering what steps could be taken to mitigate this dangerous situation. As far as the Arabs are concerned it is undoubtedly a fact that word from the Mufti in the right quarter is probably now the only chance of inducing them to hold their hand until we have gone."

Haj Amin had arrived in newly independent Lebanon in early October 1947, and the British Legation in Beirut immediately set out to discover how

much freedom he would be given. The Grand Mufti's sudden appearance, the legation noted, had not surprised the Lebanese prime minister, Riad Solh, but the Lebanese insisted that "a member of the Sûreté" was in constant attendance on Haj Amin, that his activities would be "controlled and restricted" by the Lebanese and that he "would not be allowed to indulge in any activities directed against British interests". As our diplomats in Beirut were well aware, however, the British Middle East Office in Cairo had already made contact with the man whom Britain and the Allied Forces Command in Europe regarded as a war criminal.

On 29 September, our man in Cairo had sent a secret note to the Foreign Office enclosing the report of an interview with the Mufti from "an unimpeachable source". The carefully typed notes - presumably from a British intelligence officer - portray a man who realised that disaster faced the Arabs of Palestine. The Mufti refused to contemplate the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. "He was not bargaining with the Zionists about a possession in dispute," says the report. "Palestine, including Jaffa and the Negev, belonged to the Arabs, and he did not recognise the right of anyone to 'offer' them what was theirs as a condition of consent to partition. It was like a robber trying to make conditions on which he would return stolen property." Besides, Haj Amin said, "no form of partition... would finally satisfy the Zionists. Whatever they got would merely be a springboard from which to leap on more."

The Grand Mufti, who had supported the Arab revolt against British rule in the Thirties and had subsequently sought refuge in Iraq after a pro-

German coup, then lectured his interviewee in words that must have taken the Briton's breath away. "Put yourselves in the Arabs' place," Haj Amin advised. "Remember yourselves in 1940. Did you ever think of offering the Germans part of Britain on condition that they let you alone in the rest? Of course not, and you never would." The answer to partition or a federal Palestine was "NO, categorically NO." Jews would have the same rights as Arabs in a Palestinian nation "but the Arabs would never agree to any bestowal on the Zionists of political power or privilege that put them above... the Palestinian state government".

There was no reason why Arabs and the British should not co-operate, Haj Amin said. But common interests "should not deceive the British into thinking that any Arab leader would weaken where Palestine was concerned... Palestinian Arab enmity towards the British was purely political - they hated the policy that had founded... the Zionist national home." If Britain did not support Zionist claims to Palestine, and rejected partition, "she would gain Arab friendship in a moment". But if the British continued their support, "they could never hope for Arab co-operation, for the Arabs would then be co-operating in bringing about their own destruction". Then, in words which have an ironic historical

resonance, the Grand Mufti talked of the future. "He did not fear the Jews, their Siern, Irgun, Haganah (gangs). The Arabs might lose at first, they would have many losses, but in the end they must win." The Zionists "will eventually crumble into nothing, and he did not fear the result, unless of course Britain or America... intervened, and even then the Arabs would fight and the Arab world would be perpetually hostile."

When his British visitor suggested that the Arabs might do better to accept part of Palestine rather than risk losing all, Haj Amin replied: "Who are we? A handful of exiles. Nothing. But we shall never give in or surrender our principles no matter what bribe is offered."

Should the British talk directly to Haj Amin? As fighting continued in Palestine, the British Legation in Beirut reported to the Foreign Office on 27 November that Haj Amin "no longer regards us as Arab Public Enemy No 1". But "if a decision unfavourable to the Arabs is reached at the United Nations... it is probable that the ex-Mufti (sic) will be exposed to pressure from his extremist followers..."

Continued on page 2

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Why we walk on by

Sir: I could not help having a wry smile when I read of the Home Secretary calling on the public to intervene when they encounter juvenile law-breakers ("Straw condemns 'walk on by' society", 18 February).

The main disincentive for this action is the attitude of parents, the police and Crown Prosecution Service in the event that the children respond with violence, or, even worse, make false accusations of inappropriate behaviour against you. It is also not uncommon for good citizens to be assaulted by the parents of young vandals should they have the temerity to point out their behaviour.

I would not consider taking action unless there were a host of reliable witnesses about, and I felt I could safely defend myself should the need arise.

D M WILLIAMS
Southend-on-Sea, Essex

Sir: Congratulations to our Home Secretary. We must each be ready to try and stop unruly behaviour. But what he advocates will not come about until there is an end to that foolish parrot-cry of "Do not take the law into your own hands." He is asking us to do just that instead of standing by and waiting for a policeman.

It is necessary for Parliament and the courts to give effect to his assertion that we should each act to maintain public order. The policeman who was prosecuted and fined for walloping a youth should have been thanked instead. Teachers are afraid to try and discipline their pupils for fear that, if they touch a pupil, they will be charged with assault.

It is old-fashioned to say it, but what is needed is the teaching of discipline, that is to say, self-discipline, and concern for the well-being of other people, at an early age. Because lack of courtesy, and of concern for other people, has become so widespread, the ordinary citizen is afraid to do the kind of thing to which Jack Straw referred. Nevertheless, we should salute him, act as he says, and hope that he may have started a turn in the tide.

S GRATWICK QC
Sevenoaks, Kent

Baby 'experiments'

Sir: The headline on your report on the use of a new type of ventilator for premature babies tells us that "28 babies die in hospital experiment" (18 February).

Last month I returned from several years in Tanzania as a volunteer teacher in a technical school and in a university medical school. We designed and built a low-cost, low-tech incubator for premature babies. In Tanzania, the cost of commercial incubators puts them out of reach for most hospitals.

One of our principal aims was to design something which looked as nearly as possible like a cot and not like piece of technology.

Paediatricians know that the death rate amongst premature under 1kg birthweight is very high, perhaps 90 per cent in village conditions. An incubator might save half of these deaths. However, the mothers do not distinguish full-term babies from premature; they are all just babies. Some of these will die, but half of them. If you have a (premature) baby in hospital and they put it in an incubator, it is much more likely to die than the average baby. Conclusion: incubators cook babies; don't let them put your baby into one.

One can understand a woman from a village in one of the world's poorest countries confusing elementary statistical points; but one does expect the sort of person who wrote your headline to know better - particularly as it is pointed out that the death rate for babies kept in the new ventilator was not different from that of other babies.

Our "Moshi hotcot" was a great success and is in use in other hospitals. There are many children alive now because of it. We did a lot of laboratory development work, but there was bound to come a time

when the device would be used for the first time on real babies. If you like, we experimented on them. What else could be done? Were we unethical? I thought we were trying to help.

J CARR
Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire

Sir: The questions that need to be asked about the North Staffordshire study are very simple:

Did those planning the study reasonably believe that the experimental treatment was at least as good as or better than conventional treatment?

Was consent obtained from the parents?

Did those babies who received the experimental treatment do worse than those who received conventional therapy?

If so, was it possible to discern the outcome of the study before the study was completed so that if necessary it could be terminated early?

If these questions cannot be properly answered then those responsible for the study deserve to be pilloried. Until that time, perhaps *The Independent* should devote itself to finding out the facts rather than stigmatising an entire profession. We are not the only trade which needs to avoid the sin of arrogance.Dr DAVID THOMAS
Cardiff

Modified famine

Sir: I am at a loss to fathom what need mankind has of genetically modified foods.

We are repeatedly told by biotechnology companies and not a few politicians that genetically modified foods are the solution to the developing world's ills. In the West we produce more food than we know what to do with. In the developing world people starve for a variety of reasons, few having anything to do with the inability of their lands to produce the food they need to sustain them. Genetically modified foods will do little to help the starving in Africa, but stable government and an end to internecine slaughter will cure many of their woes.

Even supposing peace and stability could be brought to the worst famine-afflicted regions, are we to believe that this wonder technology is to be given away at a price which the poorer nations could sustainably afford to pay?

The case in favour of genetically modified foods has nothing to do with any benefit that mankind may derive therefrom and everything to do with control and money. Biotechnology companies are currently engaged in a race to acquire control over the methods of, and money spent on, food production. No doubt the financial means will be found to foist this technology on to an unsuspecting developing world and thus increase the dependency of the developing world on the West, far

from helping the poorer nations to feed themselves.

It is at best a foolhardy exercise and at worst, the most cynical example of the exploitation of the developing world we have yet seen.

SIMON TUDOR-PRICE

London SW15

Sir: At least we now know the next stage in the Blairite project: New Labour: New Food.

JOHN GILLIBRAND

Menai Bridge, Anglesey

Gesture for peace

Sir: Maybe the best way to solve the logjam over IRA decommissioning is for Britain to take its natural place on the highest moral ground.

The IRA refuses to hand in weapons because they see this as surrender and humiliation. But what but such confusion would you expect from them? The IRA are only terrorists. I know this because I read it in the British press. The people who brought you Bloody Sunday, by contrast, are Security Forces.

Since the latter are so much more honourable than the IRA, let them lead the way on surrendering weapons too (just on a token, symbolic basis, of course). After all, Tony Blair told the IRA that their decommissioning would be not surrender, but a declaration of the victory of peace.

THOMAS HUTCHISON
McFADDENPembroke College,
Oxford

Feeble Euro-Tories

Sir: It was good to see the pro-euro Tories pleading for the Government to come off the fence on their plan for joining the single currency ("Brown will issue advice to business on trading in euro", 19 February).

However, their assertion that they cannot crusade for early membership until the Prime Minister gives the official lead we all crave is astonishingly feeble. It underlines the sad reality that the pro-euro Tories are essentially too weak to do other than extensive silent hand-wringing. They have no clout left at all. The courageous demarche of the Donnelly-Stevens dissident Tory group is in impressive contrast.

The feebleness in official circles and amongst the Tory europhiles is sadly mirrored in the total deafening silence of the European Movement. This is supposed to be a crusading organisation pressing hard for euro membership for the UK. In equally sad reality, it has now effectively become an arm of the same government and its hesitations.

Until Labour gives a decisive lead, industry lacks the legal authority to persuade shareholders and others to support significant spending on essential technical preparations. The Chancellor needs to find the necessary political courage, without delay.

The referendum must surely be held before the next election.

RUGH DYKES
London W1

Mummy in garden

Sir: You should have done your spadework before publishing your story "Egyptian mummy found buried in garden" (15 February). My father did die a year after bringing back the mummy's remains from Egypt - but there was no curse and no one in my family ever suggested that there had been. John Wilhelm Rowntree, who was not an "explorer" but a Quaker historian, had been in bad health long before he ever came into contact with the mummy.

The artefact was not displayed in the library, as you report, but in a coach house some way from the main building. Nor was it "hastily buried" by "grieving relatives". It was disposed of more than 20 years after my father's death because it had begun to decompose.

JEAN ROWNTREE
Stone-in-Ozney, Kent

IN BRIEF

Sir: Michael T Phillips (Letter, 18 February) must be very unlucky with his torn copies of *The Independent*, although he does have a point. Does "bigger and better" really mean that, or are we readers of the broadsheets and quality Sundays merely keeping the paper recyclers in business?

However, I think that I must be very lucky indeed, for Richard, my paper-boy will, in all weathers, carefully disassemble the various sections and feed them individually through the letterbox precisely in order to prevent my receiving a torn newspaper.

J J S GOSS
Bletchley, Buckinghamshire

Sir: The Rev Peter Mullen (Religious Notes, 16 February) says the overwhelming argument for establishment of the Church of England is that "all inhabit the same plot... this realm... this common language and shared history... the need to remain religious in the English mode". That is in fact a definition of a localised sect, not a great world religion. It is nationalism, provincialism and cultural domination - called "comprehensiveness".

Dom ALBERT STACPOOLE
Ampleforth Abbey, York

Sir: Adam LeBar, in his poignant article on the visit of the judge and jury to Domachevo (17 February), made one important error. The Jews did not die for their religion; they died because they were born Jews. Giving up their religion would not have saved them.

BERNARD FOX
Hove, East Sussex

Flirting with the enemy

Continued from page one
Contact even of a most informal sort with British officials might serve as a safety valve. The British memorandum, marked "Secret", adds that although Haj Amin's "dubious past renders the prospect of even unofficial contact with him distasteful", it could not be denied "that he enjoys very considerable prestige and influence and he may still play a part in the future government of Palestine". The Mufti had "learnt a lesson through backing the wrong side in the last war", and "advantage might be taken of his anti-Communist leanings".

Riad Solh, the Lebanese prime minister, had already offered to arrange a meet-

ing between the Mufti and a Beirut-based British diplomat called Evans, over cups of tea - Evans had been "non-committal" to the idea - but "I think it would be all to the good for a member of my staff to see him occasionally," the Legation head wrote. It would now pay the British "hand over fist" to exert any influence to avoid a wholesale clash with Palestinian Arabs. Meeting the Mufti as "an individual" would not mean "that His Majesty's Government had abandoned their principles or condoned the Mufti's misguided [sic] past... if... he has had a change of heart, mild and discreet contacts with the British might give him a chance to prove it. If the leop-

ard is still the same we shall soon find the spots under his henna."

Beneath this eloquent letter, the British diplomat had added in his own hand the damning remark that the US assistant military attaché in Lebanon had already paid a visit to the Mufti. By mid-December, General Cunningham was pleading from Jerusalem for pressure on Haj Amin "to get him to dissuade local Arabs from further violence... while we are still here". But, the High Commissioner noted, "it is clear that we cannot approach the Arabs without taking parallel action against the Jews. We are, of course, doing all we can to point out to Jews the unmitigated folly

of their actions which can only end in future bitterness which may well in the end mean disaster for their new State." Jewish claims that their actions were carried out by "dissident groups" had proved to be untrue and "it can be seen that the Jews have inflicted many more casualties on the Arabs than the reverse. Practically all [Jewish] attacks have been against buses or in civilian centres."

And, in a remarkable moment of anger, Cunningham concluded that "we have never at any time on the slightest excuse escaped vociferous and hysterical accusations by Jews that we were a people who were prone to brutal reprisals. Now they

[the Jews] have themselves come out with reprisals of a kind which would not have crossed the mind of any soldier here, and which are an offence to civilisation."

Cunningham's plea for discussions with the Mufti was forwarded to the Foreign Office. Within days, however, the Legation in Beirut was ordered to make no contact with Haj Amin. British MPs had long demanded his trial for war crimes and our ally King Abdullah of Jordan - the late King Hussein's grandfather - hated the Mufti. The British departed from Palestine in disgrace, leaving Arab and Jew to fight for the land. Three-quarters of a million Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes. The

Arabs did not eventually win, as Haj Amin had predicted, and the 51-year old Israeli state did not end in disaster as Cunningham had suggested it might. Israeli spokesmen regularly condemn the Mufti for his flirtation with Nazism, and have sought to demonise the Palestinians with his name. But recent research suggests that he was an Arab nationalist rather than a national socialist - his fairest biographer is a former Israeli military governor of the occupied West Bank.

The Mufti died in Beirut in 1974, ignored and largely forgotten even in Lebanon. Among the mourners at his funeral was Yasser Arafat.

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For food to be 'safe', our countryside must be protected

HERE IS an intriguing exercise in comparative contemporary history. Rewind the video of British politics back not quite two years, to 6 March 1997. A report into hygiene in abattoirs had found serious risks of the spread of *E coli* bacteria, but it was not shown to ministers and its recommendations were not acted on. The leader of the opposition was incredulous. Tony Blair demanded to know: "When will someone in the government take responsibility for the proper and competent administration of our affairs?"

Now that the boot is on the other foot, how does it fit? It is now two-and-a-half weeks since the Leader of the Opposition caught Mr Blair unawares at Prime Minister's Questions on an issue of food safety. Since then, the "hoo-ha" has inflated into a fully fledged food scare, culminating this past week in a series of front-page frighteners in other newspapers. Two years ago, ministerial reassurances failed to reassure, and opposition demands for ministerial resignations were brushed aside. The same is true today.

However, there are important differences. *E coli* 0157 has killed many people, and poses a far more potent and immediate threat to consumers than genetically modified food. And the Government's response has in fact been different. True, there have been uncomfortable echoes of John Major's tetchiness in Mr Blair's tone, and Jack Cunningham has been hopeless. But Jeff Rooker, the deputy Agriculture Minister, has explained how he is tightening up the labelling of GM food and what he is doing about GM crops in his matter-of-fact Birmingham accent, and with the confidence that transparently comes from knowing what he is talking about.

The truth is that there is a lot more to worry about in our food than genetically modified ingredients. GM soya, tomatoes and maize cause no direct harm - the risk is only that some unintended consequence of altering plant genes may damage human health in some unforeseeable way at some time in the future. Meanwhile there are direct and real risks of death from *E coli*, salmonella, listeria and aflatoxins. Then there are potential risks that ought to be more worrying than messing about with DNA, such as the use of chemicals on crops and antibiotics on animals and farmed fish. Some of these risks are increased by intensive farming methods, others by poor hygiene in food production or preparation. All of them require rigorous government supervision and control.

So Mr Blair should be applauded for preparing to set up the Food Standards Agency. In all the fuss over the mad scheme to fund it by charging a flat-rate tax on supermarkets and sandwich kiosks alike - which the Prime Minister has already suggested will be changed - the central point has been lost. Which is that the agency will be answerable to the Department of Health rather than the Ministry of Agriculture. This is vital, because the aspect of the GM foods saga that inspires least confidence is the conduct of big companies, primarily Monsanto, whose profits depend on further intensifying and industrialising farming.

Our colleagues on other newspapers have this issue completely wrong. What should alarm us is not GM food, but crops that have been genetically modified to



TOM LUBBOCK

make them resistant to Monsanto's weedkillers and pesticides. Whole prairies in the US have been turned into "green concrete", in which GM soya or maize grows - and nothing else. No weeds, no wild flowers, no wildlife. This does not bother Americans, who live in a big country, with wilderness areas larger than the United Kingdom. But two-thirds of Britain is cultivated, and skylarks, corn buntings and many small furry mammals have nowhere else to live but farmland.

Oddly enough, on the same day two years ago that Mr Blair was demanding ministerial accountability for safe meat, his colleague Tony Banks, now a minister,

accused the Tories of being "prepared to let people be poisoned by rotten stinking food when they could have healthy organic food".

It was rhetorical overkill, of course, but neither this government nor the last is doing enough to encourage less intensive agriculture.

Meanwhile, demand for organic food is rising so fast that much of it has to be supplied from abroad. A Food Standards Agency accountable to the Health Department is not enough. We need a powerful Green Ministry to protect the diverse wildlife of our countryside, too.

Mr Blair is the real Bennite now

READERS OLD enough to remember the crazy years when Tony Benn nearly gained control of the Labour Party will recall the methods his supporters used.

They fixed constituency delegations and trade union block votes in defiance of the wishes of the "rank and file" members in whose name their revolution was being carried out.

One reader who is old enough to remember this is Tony Blair, who helped persuade John Smith to transform Labour's internal democracy in 1983, abolishing trade union block votes in the selection of parliamentary candidates and the election of the party leader. Another year on, Mr Blair was himself elected leader under this new franchise. More than three-quarters of a million trade union members, who paid their few pence to the Labour Party on top of their union dues, voted as individuals in a national ballot, and helped choose their future prime minister.

But now he has betrayed that legacy. Today the Labour Party in Wales votes to choose its leader and likely first minister of the Welsh Assembly. Superficially, the system looks the same as that under which Mr Blair was elected. The votes are divided in equal thirds between MPs (and Welsh Assembly candidates), party members and Labour-supporting trade unionists. But trade union leaders have been allowed to cast block votes on behalf of their unions, and to decide for themselves how to do so.

Yesterday, the GMB general union announced the result of a "branch consultation ballot" in favour of Alun Michael, the establishment candidate, against Rhodri Morgan, the troublemaker. We are back in the worst dark days of Bennism, only this time Mr Blair and the GMB are the Bennites.

The GMB bosses "consulted" their branches and then added up the membership of each branch to produce figures for their spurious "ballot". In every secret vote that has been held in Wales, whether of Labour members or of trade unionists, Mr Morgan has beaten Mr Michael hands down.

This may not reflect fairly the merits of the two candidates: Mr Morgan is a disorganised joker, while Mr Michael is dull but efficient. But it fairly reflects the resentment that Labour members and supporters feel at Mr Blair's attempt to fix the outcome of a decision they thought had been devolved to them. What is the point of handing power from Westminster to Cardiff if the Labour Party is going to act as though the UK is a one-party state? "If we can't actually trust Labour Party members with decision-making within the Labour Party, how on earth are we going to go out and try to win support for the Labour Party in the broader community?" As one Mr Blair said in 1992.

Of course, that same Mr Blair learnt another lesson from Labour's civil war in the early Eighties: that a democratic party that is serious about winning must be united. But, as he argued, that unity cannot be fixed or imposed by bureaucratic means. He has to win the argument in his own party that Mr Morgan would be an electoral liability - or for that matter, that Ken Livingstone would use the mayoralty of London as a power base from which to undermine the Labour Government. That he has not even attempted to make either case suggests that neither is true, and that the attempt to block Mr Morgan and Mr Livingstone will in the end be a much greater liability for the party.

The backward glance when you're packed and ready to go

IT ONLY really begins to kick in during the last three days. It may be a trip you have known about for weeks but because thinking about it involves all kinds of unpleasant possibilities, you tend to push reality away. And then the exigencies of travel make further evasion impossible. The phone calls from the office multiply. Queries about air tickets, money and tips, and advice from others who have travelled the route before you. There are crackly phone calls from fixers with exotic names in far-away places promising to meet you at the airport or haggling over their daily rate. It could be a mere Amir in Afghanistan, Kumai in Colombo, V in Johannesburg, or a hundred other names familiar to the people of the road.

I love travel but I hate the leaving; the sense of instability and insecurity it creates in the atmosphere. That is why I try to pack my bag when there is nobody else in the house, always at the last minute. And once packed I try to hide it away. Who am I fooling? Of course my loved ones know I am going but somehow I feel that bag sitting in the hall way is too empty a sight for all of us.

There was a time when I derided those of my colleagues who were superstitious. Martin Bell's white suit was not for me. Too theatrical by half, I thought. But something has been happening because these days I too carry charms. There is a Khmer staff I picked up in Cambodia; a small wooden icon of the Madonna and Child; and my beloved Claddagh ring. The Claddagh is a gold ring with two hands intertwined around a

heart and above them a crown. Love, honour and friendship is the general idea. I never travel without it.

Why the superstition after all those years of sneering disbelief? I think it has something to do with age. I am hunching towards the big 40 and I am looking forward to my 70th birthday. Anything I can possibly do to ward off bad luck, I will do. When I am heading off to one of the world's bad lands, I do my best to avoid thinking about the possible dangers. I assess the risks as best as possible, and with that done, I try to push the dark thoughts to one side.

When colleagues of your own generation have died in war zones, there is a natural, a much greater awareness of mortality. Suddenly death is no longer only something that happens to the people you are reporting on: the high-velocity round; the shell fragment; the machete blow - they all smash through the illusion of invulnerability. Brief yourself well but do not dwell on the fearful possibilities. That way madness lies.

I like to leave early in the morning when everybody is asleep. No time then for sad goodbyes. I move around the silent house gathering my bits and pieces, gulp down a black coffee and wait for the growl of the taxi in the street outside. But on this latest trip to Africa it didn't quite work out like that. I was shaving in the bathroom when I heard a knock on the door. I opened it and saw my three-year-old son standing there sleep-eyed.

"My name is Daniel Patrick Alexander," he said, as if answering the question of an invisible stranger:



FERGAL KEANE

I put my son to bed and waited outside for the car. I needed to be moving; to get a grip on my emotion

The poor child was half asleep. Something had woken him. A dream perhaps, or was it my presence moving around the house?

I picked him up and he fell asleep again within seconds. Feeling him close to me, sleepy and warm, I wanted to pick up the telephone and cancel the trip. But I couldn't and so I carried him to our bedroom and settled him in beside his mother. And then I crept out and down the stairs onto the street. I needed the car to come; I needed to be moving; I needed to get a grip on my emotion.

And so I left for another early morning rendezvous at the airport. Oh Heathrow, Oh Heathrow - that forlorn temple of the foreign correspondent. The sight of my travelling colleagues Kevin and Nigel greatly cheered me up. In this business, you

tend to choose your fellow travellers with as much care as possible. If you are going to dangerous or unstable places, you need people who don't panic, who are not gung-ho mercenaries, and who have a strong sense of humour. Kevin and Nigel are too such gents specialists in the black humour of the road.

There is one vital ritual to complete before leaving Heathrow: the purchase of whisky and cigarettes. These are not for our own consumption - honestly - but our gifts for potentially useful and co-operative people at the other end. Believe me, many an army colonel has been charmed by the introduction of a bottle of Johnny Walker into the conversation. The cigarette has been the passport to co-operation at many a dodgy road block.

First the handshake (never let go of a man's hand in such a situation - he is much less likely to blow you away if he can feel your hand in his) and then the offer of a smoke. For the really uncooperative road block, I offer a packet of cigarettes; for the psychotic, a whole carton. The whisky, of course, must never ever be produced at a road block. The men blocking your way may already be drunk. The last thing they need is fire water that will rev them up even more.

The road can be a very lonely place. Where there are telephones it is possible to mitigate the loneliness. Nothing is sweeter than the voice of a loved one over the distant miles. You long to hear the most banal of domestic detail. What is the latest on the tiling job in the kitchen?

Has the boy's cold gone yet? After what can sometimes be days of horror and fear, you live for the soft, reassuring voice of the normal. At night, when the beers come out and we are all congregated in someone's hotel room (it is the luckless Kevin, the youngest of us on this trip), we start out with other stories of places we have been.

There is almost an element of besting one another: "You think that was bad. Wait until I tell you about Kisangani." But sooner or later we end up talking about home and those we miss. Kevin is talking about football a lot on this trip, but then he always does. He is a Queens Park Rangers fan, a devoted one despite some cruel mockery from the rest of us. Kevin's great strength is his calm. I have yet to see him lose his temper, which travelling in Africa is some testament to his forbearance. Big Nigel is a prince of the road: the man who for several years in Bosnia was cameraman to Martin Bell. You feel safe around big Nigel. He has a lucky aura.

We have a lot of work to do here. Long days among some very strange people. But home is just a week away. And on the road that is what you live for: homecoming. It is that indescribable feeling when the taxi slows to a halt outside your front door and your child's face appears at the window, laughing. And then you promise yourself you will not go to such places again. And this time you really do mean it.

Fergal Keane is a BBC News Special Correspondent

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MONITOR

ALL THE NEWS OF THE WORLD

Ocalan's arrest • Genetically modified food • Kevin Keegan's part-time job • Hillary Clinton's ambitions • Jack Straw has a go

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD

Comment on public anxiety about the safety of genetically altered food

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

THE GOVERNMENT deserves to be supported against those who scream for new bans and moratoriums. But it would be quite wrong to suggest that nothing serious is at stake here. Ignorant as most of us may be about the science involved, we are surely right to sense that the growing possibilities of breaching the species barrier are threatening to our sense of the order of being and our human place in it. We need guidance across this new territory, and we are uncomfortably aware that we are not getting it.

THE TIMES

MANY CONSUMERS are under the impression that "Frankenstein foods" have yet to escape from the laboratory, even though 60 per cent of processed foods contain genetically modified soya. Giving shoppers more information about what food contains is the surest way to allay their fears. Genetic engineering is a complex issue which cannot be addressed by soundbite assurances or allegations. If Mr Hague confronts consumers' fears in an adult manner, reaffirming his belief that informed individuals should make their own decisions about what they eat, he will win plaudits. If not, he will find that food scares are creating a Frankenstein's monster which he cannot control.

THE BIRMINGHAM POST

Once again, the vested interests of corporations, governments - and sheer greed - have introduced another potential for disaster into the human diet: a cocktail swimming in artificial substances, food which is irradiated, treated, modified and mutated. Food poisoning has been at an all-time high. As if the lessons of BSE and the salmonella in eggs scandal were not enough, the genetically modified food scandal again exposes the fact that, where public health issues and safety are concerned, the controlling authorities and regulating bodies are too inept

to tackle the issue of GMs. Let us hope that the small business corner shop can win back customers from the multiples by selling natural produce. (Ray Goodman)

NEW STATESMAN

SCIENTISTS HAVE to make a living like anybody else and those in the forefront of biotechnology research, hungry for grants from industry and government, are hardly likely to support a moratorium on further work. So what should the Government do? One answer is to produce food in order to feed people, not to make profits. Another, perhaps more realistic, is to treat people as adults, giving them the (uncertain) facts, insisting on proper labelling and then allowing them to make up their own minds. Which is exactly the policy that governments adopt for the riskiest products of all: tobacco and alcohol.

THE SUN

ALTERING THE way Mother Nature produces the things we eat may well be to everyone's benefit. But no one is going to be reassured by the glib words of any politician, least of all Jack Cunningham. And while Lord Sainsbury (recognise the name, shoppers?) is a junior minister the Government will find it hard to convince anyone it has no axe to grind. The Sun has never made the mistake of leaping on to the hand-wagon of every latest scare story. We didn't do it with Aids or BSE - and we're not going to with GM. What we need is exhaustive scientific tests and an unbiased, factual opinion.

THE MIRROR

THE ATTACKS on Lord Sainsbury are a red herring in the storm over GM foods. For it all comes down to the public's lack of confidence in their safety. Tony Blair, usually so in touch with public opinion, is for once out of step. He must understand that his opinions on these controversial new products cannot be rammed down people's throats - any more than GM foods can be.

Leader's fate inflames Kurds

TURKISH DAILY NEWS

TURKEY IS a powerful state whose arms can extend everywhere to apprehend a criminal and bring him to justice. Turkey has proved that it is an asset for its friends and a dreaded enemy for its foes. It has flexed its muscles in the Ocalan event and has proven its value. Turkey not only pushed Ocalan out of Syria but also prevented any European country from giving refuge to this terrorist leader. His arrest is only the beginning. We feel he should be brought to justice without any delay or fuss. However, we all have to be on guard against emotional separatist terrorist outbursts these days, both at home and in Europe.

LA STAMPA
Italy

ALL THE European countries have good reasons to try to stay away from the Ocalan case. Germany has to think about its 2 million Turks and half a million Kurds residing on its territory and about the possible risks for its public order. Greece already has very difficult relations with Turkey. In Italy, part of the leftist parties have close ties to the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) and the volatile government majority may split over Ocalan. But the truth is that the Kurds are a nation, the PKK is a party, and the European Union is neither.

The Kurdish problem may even be impossible to solve. Europe doesn't have the courage to either face it or simply deny it. As it always happens, Europe could only cover its weakness with silence.

MAARIV
Jerusalem

TURKEY WILL be sorry that Ocalan was captured. The Kurds will express their feelings not only in the streets of Europe but also by acts of terror in Turkey. World opinion sees people such as Ocalan as freedom fighters. If he is sentenced to death, world leaders will act for his amnesty. The Kurds will take hostages in an effort to win the freedom of their leader. The struggle for Kurdish independence will be renewed. It's questionable whether all this is worth the



ABDULLAH OCALAN'S ARREST

Verdicts on Turkey's capture and intended trial of the leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party, Abdullah Ocalan

head of the leader of the underground, who was seen as an escaped terrorist.

THE AGE
Australia

IF AUSTRALIAN Kurds are genuine about making representations on behalf of Kurds,

they could do worse than exploit that relationship and whatever leverage we can exert. Turkey's treatment of the Kurds remains a stumbling block to its joining the EU and it knows it. The Government should press Turkey to ensure that Mr. Ocalan's trial is both fair and transparent and that a better deal can be found for the country's Kurdish population.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE
US

THE KURDS have long been a people in search of their own country. They have been gassed by Saddam Hussein in Iraq and persecuted in Iran. In Turkey, they represent some 15 per cent of the population today, and their claims go back to 1920. It is one measure of Turkey's unbending approach to dissent that the separatist rebellion has gone so long without a negotiated settlement. At first blush, it doesn't appear that Ocalan's arrest will make such a settlement any more likely.

KHALEJ TIMES
UAE

The mood in Turkey is both jubilant and defiant in the face of Western criticism. It would, however, be in Ankara's interest to hold a fair interrogation and trial of Ocalan and to be seen to be doing so. At home, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is a doubly crowned hero - during an earlier stint Turkish troops had invaded northern Cyprus and remain there - but he will need to negotiate through choppy international waters with great care and astuteness to sell his new triumph to the world.

THE JAPAN TIMES

THE CAPTURE of Ocalan, used wisely, could permit the Turkish government to claim that it has defeated the armed struggle and is now ready to get on with a political solution. Ocalan has never been an ideal leader, and a more thoughtful, politically attractive and savvy leader could now emerge in his place. That may not be good news for Turkey with its current policies - especially since the trial of Ocalan, if not handled right, presents Ankara with major problems, attracting international press coverage, putting Turkish justice itself on trial and perhaps creating a national martyr for the Kurdish population. Handled correctly, his trial could also present a major opportunity for the government to demonstrate a new tolerance toward Kurdish political activity in the country among moderate, non-violent and democratic Kurdish leaders. Turkey should have the self-confidence to move in this direction.

KEVIN KEEGAN'S PART-TIME JOB

Views on the Football Association's decision to appoint Kevin Keegan as temporary manager of England football team

THE EVENING MAIL

MANAGING ENGLAND is more than a livelihood, it is the greatest honour our game can bestow. A life of itself, Al-Fayed, Keegan's boss at Fulham, appears to understand this and gave permission to Keegan to talk to the FA. For Keegan not to would have seemed wild. He is a man whose emotional agonies have fascinated us and who preferred to play golf in Spain to staying in the game.



THE SUN

KEEGAN IS in an awkward spot. He can't answer to the FA and the oily Egyptian. We need an above-board appointment with no strings. And that means no deals with a man as slippery as camel dung.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

ONE OR two of Keegan's predecessors have been found twisting in the wind, hanged by their own words. In certain sections of the press, he will find, our football managers and coaches are treated far more severely than any of our politicians. There will be unsuccessful days on the field, after which he will find himself described on the pages of the tabloid newspapers in terms designed to make his family flee their home. He will find it easier to take this playfulness with good humour if he learns by heart Kipling's poem, "If".

THE BIRMINGHAM POST

QUITE WHAT has transformed Keegan from helmsman of Mohamed Fayed's money-laden "plucky cup battlers" to potential world-beater in the fortnight since Hoddle's departure is unclear. But we must wish him well and hope that, in the short term at least, his drive will do the trick. In the longer term, the FA must

THIS GIVES the former England captain the opportunity to test out the demands of the national job. He has the best of all worlds. Win and he's a hero. Lose and he's only the caretaker with an exit door wedged ajar for a swift getaway.

HILLARY CLINTON'S AMBITIONS

The US press considers the possibility of the First Lady running for election to the Senate

TOPEKA CAPITAL JOURNAL

IT WAS clear from the outset that Hillary Rodham Clinton would not be a cookie-baking first lady. She has her own following, and undoubtedly her own silent ambitions. Mrs Clinton has emerged from her husband's scandal looking only taller for her dignified air and measured tongue - and for weathering the buffeting winds stirred up by her husband's philandering. A race in 2000 with her in it would be intriguing. In fact, why not stage another Dole-Clinton race for president - only in high heels? Just when you thought politics was dull...

USA TODAY

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM this week has Hillary running next year for a US Senate seat from New York State. Probably. Or possibly even as vice-presidential running mate to Al

Gore. Either would be viewed by her as a stepping stone. With 20 or more years left for her own political career, Hillary's goal has to be a return to the White House as the first female president. She might make it, sans a "first man". Unless Elizabeth Dole beats her to it, hubby Bob in hand.

PIONEER PLANET

LET US once again turn to the Constitution: "If the president is impeached in the House and acquitted in the Senate - his wife must move to New York." Speculation alimbo: If Hillary runs for Senate, her campaign could be both lively and a perfect cover for a trial separation. Try to imagine Sen Hillary Rodham Clinton as a new junior member. Who's going to tell her that her seat is in the back? Or President Elizabeth Dole - as first husband Bob hosts the traditional Senate spouses lunch, where Bill Clinton is wearing a name tag.

JACK STRAW HAS A GO

Response to the Home Secretary's appeal to the public not to turn a blind eye to crime

THE EXPRESS

DRAWING THE line between standing up for the citizen on the street and putting one's own personal security at risk is difficult. The danger in Jack Straw's call for an end to the walk on by society is that in obeying his command people will get hurt. None the less he is right: if we did all stand up for each other more, it would make an enormous difference to our quality of life. We should not allow ourselves to be held hostage by the thug society.

THE GUARDIAN

STRAW SHOULD use his authority over the police to encourage a preventive line by officers at the scene of crimes. Instead of asking witnesses what they saw, officers should ask how events were allowed to get so out of hand. It ought to make witnesses think more deeply about what could have been done to prevent the part-

icular crime or antisocial behaviour. The test facing Mr Straw is whether his attack on the "walk on by" society is left as a one-off soundbite or has a proper follow-through.

DAILY MAIL

WE ARE an undisciplined society, teeming with self-righteous semi-anarchists, in which we increasingly use the law to try to regulate fairly minor antisocial behaviour. The result is... many people feel that to be active citizens in the way Straw recommends is to go along with an increasing busyness that is deeply unpopular.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

MR STRAW'S rallying cry is an admirable one, but until he takes steps to ensure that enforcing the law will not land the ordinary citizen on the wrong side of it, it may fall on deaf ears.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



"In future, I will do as little as I can get away with." Julie Walters, actor (pictured)

"It's the worst day for Frinton since the Luftwaffe beat up the town in 1941." Roy Coddick, secretary of Frinton Residents' Association, on the vote allowing the town its first pub.

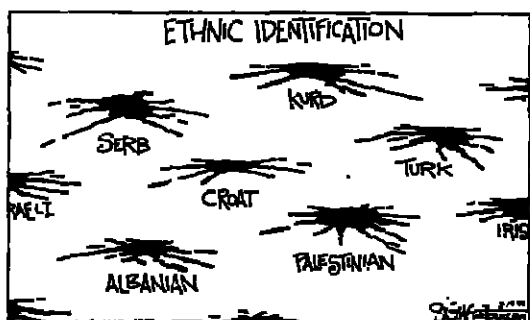
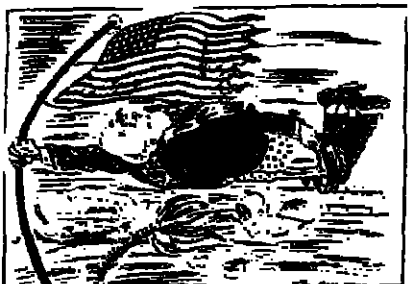
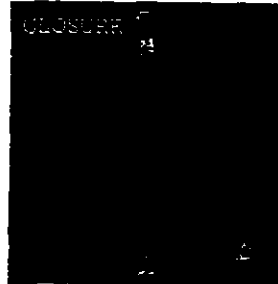
"If you have a problem seeing naked bodies, you have a problem." Melinda Messenger, model and television presenter

"You don't have to not like sex, drugs and rock'n'roll just because you stop." Kate Moss, model

"Shakespeare had British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's fiercely shrewd eyes." Camille Paglia, feminist author and broadcaster

"We middle-aged should firmly boycott all those businesses that show the slightest signs of having been infected by the youth virus." John Humphrys, broadcaster

THE VIEWS OF THE WORLD

PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS
USSUNDAY INDEPENDENT
IrelandTHE GAZETTE
CanadaTrouw
Netherlands

MISCELLANEOUS

Stories from around the world

LUBBOCK AVALANCHE JOURNAL
US

TODAY IS "Kids Aren't Cargo Day". This refers to the danger posed to children riding in the beds of pick-up trucks. That danger is such an obvious one that it is hard to believe anyone would allow their children to do such a thing.

MILLIYET
Turkey

THE AUDIO cassette to be played at the pro-religion Virtue Party (FP) rallies begins with litanies in praise of God and ends with Boney M's "Rasputin", which tells the

story of the "mad Russian priest". In the new version, the lyrics, in Turkish, are a call for justice and freedom. For the first time, female voices are used on an FP cassette. The FP Chairman approved of the cassette, according to the chairman of Ironplus, the advertising company which prepared the medley.

VIETNAM NEWS

WHEN THE national judo team took part in the games in Beijing after a 16-year absence, it returned home empty-handed. Just a year later we've picked up the gold medal at the Games held in Manila, signalling an impressive return by Vietnam into the regional judo arena.

RESEARCH BY SALLY CHATTERTON

Missing: one doctor, one dentist, one hairdresser

IT MUST be a couple of years now since I saw my doctor, by which I mean the general practitioner with whom I am officially registered. Every time I make an appointment I see a different locum, each as friendly and as efficient as the last, and yet I cannot help feeling vaguely dissatisfied with the arrangement. I like my doctor, or at any rate, what I remember of him. He has, after all, been privy to the more intimate details of my private life for nearly 20 years, and while friendliness and efficiency play an important part in the doctor-patient relationship, familiarity must surely have its place, too.

"How come I never get to see Dr T any more?" I asked the receptionist last time I went to the surgery. She said she didn't know, she was new herself, but she

thought he was more involved in general admin these days. "Non-sense," said the woman following me into the waiting-room. "He's got a very lucrative little number addressing focus groups in California about how much job satisfaction he gets out of being a GP in London."

Thinking about it afterwards on the bus going home, I was struck by just how tedious a GP's life must be - peering down infected throats, squinting into seeping ears, prodding pus, examining rashes on the less attractive parts of the human anatomy. The wonder is that more of them don't cut and run to California in search of focus groups.

And then, family enough, the same thing happened with my dentist. "He only comes in three days a week now," explained his secretary. "Your first appointment won't

be for six weeks, I'm afraid." No, not focus groups this time. Forensic dentistry, that's what my dentist does on Thursdays and Fridays. He helps the police to identify murder

victims by their dental records. Last time I went, he'd just come back from the Far East where he'd been helping investigators to identify more than 100 people killed in an air crash. I remembered that particular crash. About 30 people survived, and through a mouthful of spit - he was performing a particularly delicate root-canal treatment - I asked my dentist where the survivors had been sitting. The older I get the more paranoid I become about flying.

He said it had been one of his jobs to reposition the bodies in their seats for this very reason, but alas, there was no set pattern for survival, no guaranteed safe seat. The upshot of all this is that, far from dreading them, I now relish my twice-yearly visits and the prospect of yet more macabre tales.

Everyone benefits from an outside interest. I was planning on finding mine in the 25 years I am due to spend in the wilderness shortly if I follow the ancient Hindu rule for a perfect life. The guru who gave them to me had just returned from his wilderness stint.

Here's how it goes. In your first 25 years on earth you grow in mind and body. In your next 25 years you achieve, you acquire. In your third 25 you renounce the world, go into the wilderness and meditate, and in your last period you return to society and teach the wisdom you've learnt in the wilderness. I wonder whether California counts as a wilderness. With any luck, when my doctor returns he will regale me with so much Baywatch wisdom that it will quite take my mind off my current ailment, which is where this story began.

The last locum I saw in place of Dr T advised me that there was a five-month waiting-list to see the NHS consultant. In the circumstances, I'd better go privately. Did I have private medical insurance? Certainly not, I don't believe in it. I said, "In that case," said the locum, "it will cost you about £150 but you can see him tomorrow."

I had no idea that private hospitals were such luxurious places. This was less a hospital than a hotel, with bunkies in red satin waistcoats carrying silver trays full of dainty afternoon teas along thickly carpeted corridors. My consultant, who had a spotted bow tie and a pink carnation in his buttonhole, neither squinted, peered, prodded nor examined. He merely

glanced at the X-rays of my wretched fingers and said, in the weary tones of one who has said it many times before, "The trouble with us writers is that there is no real cure apart from anti-inflammatory pills, which could have side-effects, and steroid injections, which don't always work." Now there's a man who's been stuck in a rut too long and could do with an outside interest, such as California focus groups or murder victims.

"And you paid £150 for that?" gasped a friend. Well no, I paid £225, £150 for the consultation and £75 for the X-rays.

To cheer myself up I rang the hairdresser for an appointment. "It'll have to be next Thursday," said the girl. "Gavin only works two days a week now. Didn't you know?" He's training to be a magistrate.



SUE ARNOLD
Peering down infected throats - the wonder is more of them don't cut and run to California

THE SATURDAY PROFILE TERRENCE MALICK, FILM DIRECTOR

The return of the maverick

TERRENCE MALICK, the JD Salinger of American film-making, is back after a magisterial 20-year hiatus. Never mind that this famous recluse won't give interviews or allow a recent photograph of himself to be used in publicity drives. His war movie *The Thin Red Line*, with its clutch of Oscar nominations, speaks for itself. No one else but Terrence Malick could have made it. He's unique.

The swirl of legends, whispered stories and rumours that surround the name of this elusive 56-year-old film-maker are extraordinary. He's almost as reclusive as that other film-making, unshaven, oil-man's son, Howard Hughes. Why did he give up film-making for 20 years? Did he, like David Lean after *Rycca's Daughter*, simply give up after a very bad film-making experience (in Lean's case, for 14 years)? Did he, perhaps, go picturesquely mad, as some have rashly said? Was he really working through a vast, gas-dollar inheritance throughout the Eighties? Why exactly was he living in Paris? Was he perhaps in some reclusive-director pact with Stanley Kubrick, just over the Channel?

We do know a few facts about Malick. We know for sure that he was born in 1943 in Ottawa, Illinois, the son of a wealthy oil-company executive. He was mostly raised in the Texan redoubt of Waco among the gently nodding donkeys of the oilfields - yes, that Waco. A super-bright Harvard graduate, he studied as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford before becoming a journalist for *Newsweek*, *Life* and *The New Yorker*.

When that career failed to please him, he opted for another, loftily teaching philosophy at MIT, before finally succumbing to the lure of film-making. He went off to film school and then started writing scripts at a dime a dozen.

It's here that the legends begin: that in 1971 he had a hand in the screenplay (uncredited) for *Drive He Said*, Jack Nicholson's forgotten directorial debut and follow-up to *Easy Rider*. Then there's a fairly credible story that it was Malick who wrote the first draft for that classic Clint Eastwood vehicle, *Dirty Harry*. Who knows? By 1972 he was getting legit, and he wrote an accredited screenplay for Stuart Rosenberg's *Pocket Money* before following up the next year with his stunning directorial debut, *Badlands*. Malick really arrived in 1973 - and no matter that he shared that year's honour with Martin Scorsese and his debut, *Mean Streets*. *Badlands* starred Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek as a deranged dushman and his moll on a killing spree through the eponymous *Badlands* of Dakota and Montana. It's a seminal film that still knocks a dozen later sleazy exploitation clones into a cocked hat; its air of unreality is accentuated by the odd musical score and the superb cinematography. As an examination of the murder house like an island in a sea of wheat. Enter Richard Gere and Brooke Adams as seasonal migrant workers who can their way

into Shepherd's life; cue tragedy death and vast panoramas of a 19th-century prairie harvest. The photographer Nestor Almendros netted an Oscar for his work on the movie, which *Variety* was to dub "One of the great cinematic achievements of the Seventies".

But things were awry in Malick's world. Even before the movie was released, news of his fights with Richard Gere were legendary. The director is known for brooking no argument; he sees his own movies as personal quests of a quasi-mystical nature, which certain actors are invited to attend. Malick, like Prospero with his spirits, lays down the law in his private domain: but the uppity Gere - we assume in pre-Buddhist phase - decided to take his ego for a walk.

After the movie's critical success, Malick was offered a dream movie deal by Charles Bluhdorn, head of Paramount's parent company Gulf & Western, which allowed him virtually unlimited resources in which to come up with his next movie. Shutting between homes in Austin, Texas and one in Paris, Malick began to tinker with a film that would dramatise "the origins of life". He very expensively assembled footage from all over the world - the Arctic, the Great Barrier Reef - featuring pulsating jellyfish and fracturing ice-shelves. Whenever Paramount was foolish enough to ask for some results, Malick would simply send them an incomprehensible script full of visual descriptions of invertebrates and with no dialogue whatsoever. It was a splendid, career-destroying folly. Paramount got nervous, but Malick preempted them; in 1983 he walked away from the megalomaniac project altogether and disappeared into the wilderness.

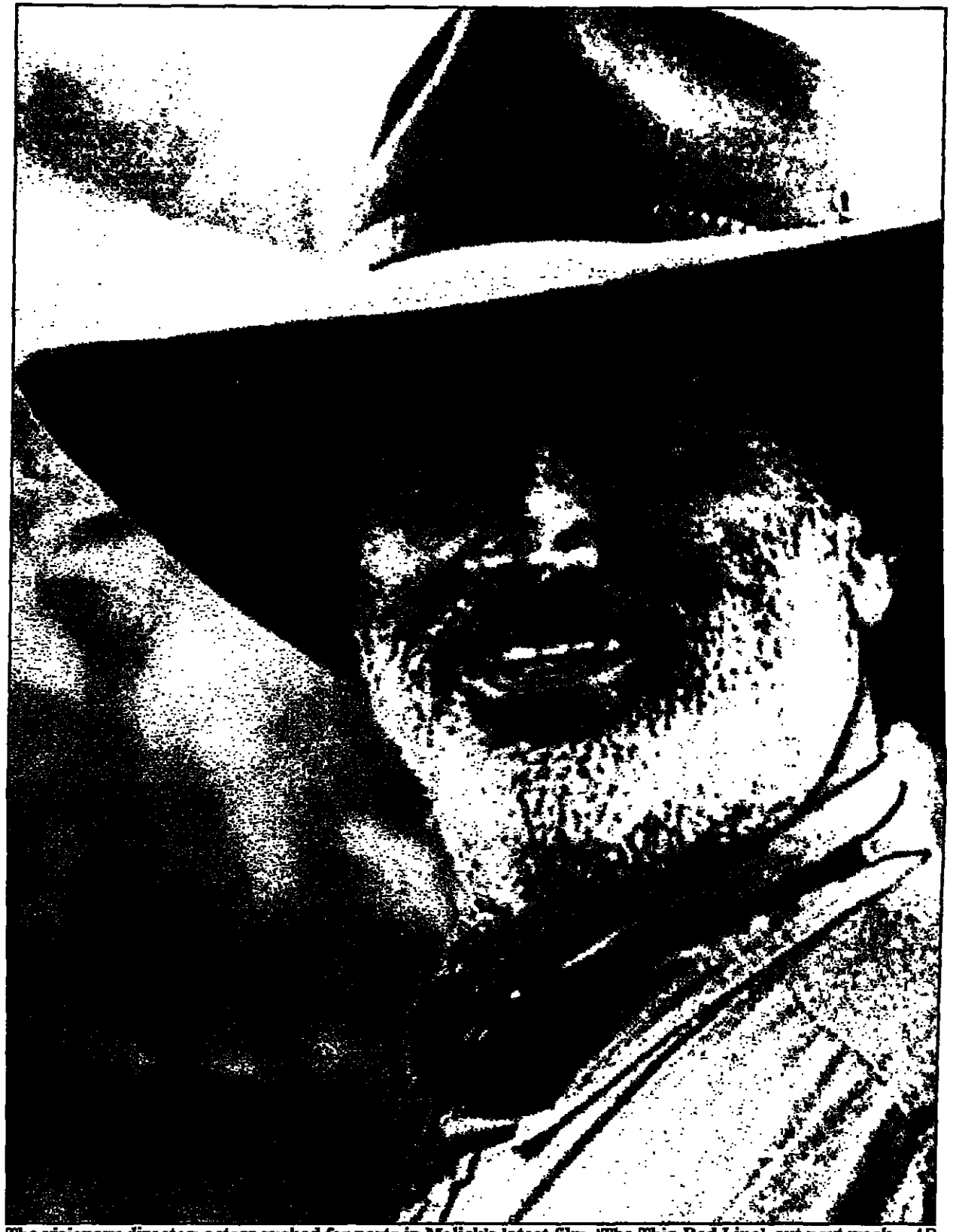
What did he do then? Nobody really seems to know the answer. His friends are all sworn to silence. It's clear that he didn't really need to earn a living, but maybe the answer was a simple creative block. The sprawling, unfocused nature of his *Origins of Life* project certainly seem to indicate an artistic crisis: that he was stuck in a rut of gathering material, but never having the confidence to fashion it.

There are persistent rumours that he became a lowly paid script-doctor (not necessarily a lowly job - Carrie Fisher does it - but certainly an invisible one). But this seems mildly implausible, bearing in mind that conventional narrative has never been one of Malick's strong points. And yet here is a contradiction: for all his highbrow leanings as a director of his own material, we discover that during the Eighties he was involved in such pap as the Jerry Lee Lewis biopic *Great Balls of Fire* and the 1989 Paul Newman vehicle *Blaze*.

How did the man who dreamt up *Dirty Harry* and *Great Balls of Fire* come to be regarded as a great poet of American cinema, almost without par, a legend partly because he never makes anything and all he has ever made has been exceptional? Extraordinary talents are allowed their contradictions, perhaps; but his

LIFE STORY

Origins: Born 1943, Ottawa, Illinois. Precise date unknown.
Background: Father an executive at Phillips Petroleum. Two brothers.
Education: Episcopalian School, Austin, Texas. Harvard University, Rhodes scholar, Oxford.
Married: First, Jill Jakes, an assistant to the director Arthur Penn; now married to Michèle Gleason, from France.
Career: Journalism (*Newsweek*, *Time* and *The New Yorker*), lecturer in philosophy at MIT, and cinema.
Training: American Film Institute. Translator of Heidegger's *The Essence of Reasons*.
Films: *Badlands* (1973), *Days of Heaven* (1977) and *The Thin Red Line* (1999).
Residence: Paris, France.
Philosophy: "Our confusion is not anarchic, it has its own discipline." (Introduction to Heidegger)
His colleagues say: "He's a genius. That's the good news and the bad news."
His actors complain: "Terry won't let go. He'll nip-pick you to death."
He says: Almost nothing.



The visionary director: actors rushed for parts in Malick's latest film, 'The Thin Red Line', out next week AP

classic. But after finishing the shoot, Malick spent two years in the editing suit, cutting and recutting the scenes with the kind of perfectionist mania for which he was fast becoming famous. (This is where he differs most from Kubrick: Kubrick has an almost mathematical approach to the construction of movies, whereas Malick is always thought of as having a "poetical" approach, a more lyrical style, editing on hunches rather than searching out the perfect take.) Eventually the completed film was praised out of his reluctant hands, and *Days of Heaven* was released in 1978. A far more sweeping film than *Badlands*, it features Sam Shepard as a dying gentleman farmer living in a wooden, Gothic house like an island in a sea of wheat. Enter Richard Gere and Brooke Adams as seasonal migrant workers who can their way

into Shepherd's life; cue tragedy death and vast panoramas of a 19th-century prairie harvest. The photographer Nestor Almendros netted an Oscar for his work on the movie, which *Variety* was to dub "One of the great cinematic achievements of the Seventies".

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back work does belie an interest and understanding in conventional movie-making and pop culture, an interest that is entirely subsumed by the more philosophical bent of his own directed films.

In 1989 Malick was approached by the theatre producers Robert Geisler and John Roberdeau to write a script for DM Thomas's novel *The White Hotel*. He turned down this account of the Holocaust (oft admired, still unfilmed) and told them he was willing to write either *The Thin Red Line* (based on James Jones's book) or Moliere's *Tartuffe*. They passed on the French number. When the script of the war movie was delivered, the producers set to work to persuade Malick to direct it.

When it was suddenly announced that Malick was casting for a new movie, there was an almost unseemly rush as every young actor who had grown up working the video of *Badlands* ragged vied for a role. There were more than 50 speaking parts in the script; plenty of roles were on offer. No matter that the producers let in de-

stabilising cameos from the likes of George Clooney and John Travolta (thereby injecting a weird sense of Nineties celebrity culture into this paean to the Second World War battle of Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands). Big names wanted in. Here's a small window on the man. Actors who report their phone calls from Malick, who would personally tell them that they had been cast, reveal a very softly-spoken, understated person. He would be almost apologetic, as if they were doing him a favour rather than the other way round. He was always refined, polite and rather European in his manner.

The Thin Red Line is up against *Saving Private Ryan* in the Oscar stakes, but it does seem possible that Malick will steal Best Director from Spielberg. Spielberg, by all accounts, admires Malick, sharing a limo with him to one award ceremony recently; Malick has just the kind of broad sweeps that Spielberg idolises in David Lean, though with a distinctly more painterly style and with a pointed tendency for

arcane lyricism. *The Thin Red Line* is dream-like, obsessed with natural images and order (despite the horrors of war), and though Malick shares with Spielberg a tendency to explore issues of masculinity, he is a highly cerebral film-maker. When he's behind the camera, at least.

So if you watch the Oscar ceremonies you may see a sighting of a very rare bird (another Malick fact: he's an expert ornithologist), the Hollywood recluse. He's already indicated that he enjoyed the experience of making *The Thin Red Line* so much that he wants to direct another soon, though it's hard to say whether he'd still have the power that such a comeback project always has. Would famous actors clear their diaries for him next time? Who knows. At least he's back a great director, safely back from the sticks, making unconventional, expressive and inspired movies of the kind no one else can manage. Hollywood needs its mavericks now more than ever. It needs its low-burning fuses.

ROGER CLARKE

ISN'T THE name just perfect? Try calling him Douglas or John. It doesn't work. But Stirling suggests the driver's essential Englishness, an Englishness that hardly ever existed outside the movies or the jewels of Ian Fleming. We're talking steely determination, feats of derring-do executed with panache, silk scarves, cocktails till dawn, and, underpinning it all, the English gentleman's code of honour.

The 1959 Portuguese Grand Prix provides a perfect example of Stirling's gent. His British rival, Mike Hawthorn, spun his car and was threatened with disqualification and the loss of seven points. Moss, who witnessed the incident, spoke up for Hawthorn, who was allowed to keep the seven points, ensuring

that he won the championship - by just one point - even though Moss outgunned him in race victories by four to one.

Moss, of course, never won a drivers' championship. That's how English he was. He was a patriot - one of the reasons for his failure to win the championship was his determination to drive for British teams whenever possible - but that was not what endeared him to the British public. By the time Stirling emerged in 1948, they had had enough of that in the war. Stirling was a dashing cavalier, brightening the post-war austerity and helping his countrymen forget about petrol rationing and bread queues.

But don't allow the raffish flying scarf and the Cooper cars from the

ACCIDENTAL HEROES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

28: STIRLING MOSS, RACING DRIVER

little factory in Surbiton fool you into believing that this was some kind of romantic amateur. Moss was keenly aware of his own worth, and pursued endorsements enthusiastically.

He even had the gall to advertise the Crown Topper, a toupée, despite never seeking to hide the baldness that afflicted him - blessed him, he would say - from his mid-twenties. His rather ambivalent tribute to the product indicated that if he

were to wear a wig, this would be the one he would choose.

Stirling's lack of hair, he recently told the BBC programme *Sporting Greats*, has in fact enabled him to retain his sexual allure into his twilight years, since his appearance is not significantly different from that in his racing days.

He is now 69, and makes his living telling racing stories at expensive dinners. By all accounts,

he gives excellent value, as ever. It is difficult to think of anyone other than Moss who could get away with telling an audience of blue-rinses on a cruise ship: "In 1954 I went by ship to Sebring, on the *Queen Elizabeth*, but I only went by sea because of the crumpet. Mind you, there's not much crumpet on this one."

It's difficult to know how much the "crumpet" - a recurring feature of Moss's reminiscences - was, alongside the silk scarves and the baldness, part of what would now be called brand-building (a black-and-white newsworld hero, maybe, but ahead of his time), but you could excuse drivers of his era living for the moment, given the extraordinary dangers they faced every time they took to the track.

"The cars were mobile death-traps," according to the commentator Murray Walker. "There were petrol tanks over the drivers' legs, behind them and alongside them. There was no crush protection: the drivers had no safety-belts; they wore T-shirts with bare arms, and linen trousers and helmets."

But it's not the fact that he chose to risk death that makes Stirling a hero, but the style and extraordinary skill with which he did it. He also earns our respect by his unwillingness to remain rooted in that era. He retains a keen interest in the current Formula One scene, and is unfailingly generous to modern drivers in their much safer cars. Another sterling quality. And to think his mother wanted to call him Hamish.



THE WEEKLY MUSE

BY MARTIN NEWELL



The cuckoo pint and elder leaves
Are first to come and long to stay
And Spring, the tinker loiters near
But never gives the game away
Then cold sets in to close the day.

Rhubarb, rhubarb, that's the stuff.
Unfashionable? No, think again.
The restaurants can't get enough
And "forced" may be the New Champagne.
The compotes with foie gras terrine
Mean rhubarb's coming home at last.
But *Rheum raphaniticum* once seen
In gardens of my misspent past
Was massive in its leaves and stem
And only grown so boys like me
Could catapult great holes in them
From high up in a nearby tree.

With sedatives dropped in their food
To temper those in frisky mood
The horses of Her Majesty
Are not as sharp as they should be.
Excessive equine *foie d'esprit*
May hinder Household Cavalry
Who cannot risk being thrown *en masse*
Base over apex - or cuirasse.
The drug with which the fodder's laced
Goes by the clubby name of "paste",
And, stoned on it, the steeds stand by
To do their duties dull of eye.
Now some will say this needs to be
For state occasions' dignity,
While others may prefer of course
To stone the Palace, not the horse.

Hang on! It's "Nineteen Eighty-three...
A Merman I Shall Turn To Be".
This isn't some nostalgia drift -
But Hendrix playing in the lift!
The firm that brought you Muzak say
That Jimi's been decreed OK,
So hotel lobbies, lifts and halls
Have Hendrix bouncing round the walls.
A snappy slogan, too, no doubt:
"Turn up, turn in, nod off, check out."
And there beside the freebie soap,
"Your complimentary blim of dope".

The food, the food of Frankenstein
Is cheap, looks good and tastes divine.
We smoke, we drink, we drive a car -
Such temples as our bodies are,
Why panic when our soya beans
Are modified by dubious means?
Besides, our kids, the little loves,
Look sweet in their three-fingered gloves.

THE WEASEL

Great platefuls of wheelks, tripe and bone marrow are preparation
for a veritable feast of Goya in a city where it pays to be French

THOUGH THE wretched conditions of its textile workers inspired Victor Hugo to pen some of his less cheery works, modern Lille turned out to be incomparably more wealthy, stylish and well-preserved than any British town of the same size (pop 172,000). It boasts two world-class art museums, a trendily spruced-up old town, a thriving theatre (Peter Brook's company is currently in residence) and a food market that would not look out of place in heaven. How do the Froggies manage it? On our visit last weekend, Mrs W and I took sly consolation from the prodigious mounds and caricatures of dog shit which force pedestrians to perform a frequent fandango when negotiating the city's pavements. At least in curbing their poodles, the British are streets ahead.

After rendezvousing with our Parisian pals, we made tracks for a brasserie. I stoked up on *bulots* in garlic sauce (why are French wheelks so much tastier than ours?) and the tripe sausage known as *andouillette*. Incidentally, in her classic volume *Charcuterie*, Jane Grigson writes that this delicacy is "quite easy to make at home... If you have to clean the tripe yourself, the bath is the best place." Anyway, it was around the mid-way point in this blow-out that I saw another dish being delivered to a neighbouring table which I simply had to have. It was not so much greed as the strictures of Britain's nanny state that prompted me to order this treat.

A few minutes later, something resembling a pile of sawn-up cricket bats was placed before me. "This is illegal

in Angleterre," I told our bemused friends as I probed the hot beef bones for their cache of oozy marrow. To be honest, I felt a bit queasy afterwards. I'm sure it was the unhappy gastronomic marriage of wheelks, tripe and fatty marrow that caused my discomfort, but I don't know whether I'll get quite so worked up about New Labour's interdict in future.

HOWEVER, WE were not in Lille just to pig out on Flanders nosh. At the Modern Art Museum, we saw works ranging from a stunning black-and-white Jackson Pollock to a concrete-mixer carved in wood (nothing to get churned up about). But the main point of our visit was a rare exhibition of works by Goya at Lille's grandiose Palais des Beaux Arts. Mind you, it seemed touch and go whether we would gain admittance to the Spanish masterpieces. "You didn't book in advance? Oh dear!" chuckled an English couple we ran into on Saturday morning. It seemed to me that their sympathy was not without a touch of *schadenfreude*. "We just managed to get in by queuing last night. It's bound to be worse today."

Sure enough, when we entered the museum an endless serpent of Goya fans was queuing for admission. It was painfully reminiscent of the time when Mrs W and I went to Amsterdam for the Van Gogh centenary show a decade ago, and, omitting to buy tickets in advance, saw no more than the shaking head of a Rijksmuseum guard.

But I'd forgotten the power of *l'état* in France. The male half of our French chums works for the Ministry of Culture. He coolly skipped the queue, whistled in an official ear and returned with four tickets. On the following morning we were prowling the Goyas - a hallucinatory mix of glowing portraits and nightmarish visions - before the army of aesthetes arrived.



Our influential pal pulled off an even more impressive feat when we visited Paris a couple of summers ago. At the time, he was involved in refurbishing a number of churches prior to a Papal visit. (Rather cannily, the Holy Father did not reveal exactly which church he intended to pop into, but provided the French government with a list of possibilities.) From the observation deck at the top of the Pompidou Centre, our friend pointed out the

structures which he had embellished with state funds: "There's one of mine, and there and there..." And all over Paris, freshly gilded spires and domes glittered where his finger pointed.

AS WE prepared to part from our French friends, we realised that our rail journeys home would take exactly the same time. Their journey from Lille to Paris Gare du Nord was scheduled to take exactly 64 minutes, the same as our subterranean hike to Ashford International. My joy at this symmetry was only slightly marred by the fact that the return tickets for the Weasels cost £152.40 (which I grizzled about at length last week), while the Parisian duo paid only £85. I suppose someone has to cough up for that £10.5bn hole under the Channel. OK, so there was a slight disparity in travel costs, but the cost of a two-night stay in a Lille hotel is bound to be the same for French and English guests, isn't it? Well, no, as a matter of fact. Taking advantage of a government scheme aimed at encouraging the French to take weekend breaks in the republic's towns rather than the countryside, our friends paid exactly half as much as us. So much for the *entente cordiale*.

IT WOULD only end in tears on this side of the Channel, but I rather like the French habit of naming streets after the great and good. Mind you, some names are better than others. Our

Parisian pals have the good fortune to live near rue Brillat-Savarin (18th arrondissement), which honours the culinary philosopher, but it must be slightly dispiriting for their daughter, who recently moved to rue Emile Durkheim (18th arr), the renowned authority on suicide.

After flipping through the pages of the *Plan de Paris*, the capital's equivalent of the *London A to Z*, I realise that there are many worse possibilities. Imagine the chagrin, if you happen to be nasally well-endowed, of living on rue Cyrano de Bergerac (18th arr), and it would surely intensify the pain of cuckoldry if you had the misfortune to live on rue Feydeau (2nd arr), which celebrates France's sauciest *farceur*. It would be scarcely reassuring to reside on rue Becquerel (18th arr), who gave his name to a measure of radioactive exposure. I wonder whether the residents of avenue Prud'homme (16th arr), who was famous for believing "all property is theft", suffer a particularly high rate of burglaries?

Imagine the surreal pleasure of starting the day on allée André Breton (1st arr) or walking your lobster down rue Gérard de Nerval (18th arr). Some addresses are singularly appropriate for Anglophone residents: it will always be summertime on rue George Gershwin (12th arr), but a touch chilly on rue du Capit Scott (15th arr) and undoubtedly creepy on rue Edgar Poe (19th arr). I'm sure that rue du Docteur Finlay (16th arr) imparts a bracing hint of Tannochbrae to the rive gauche. Personally, I feel irresistibly drawn to avenue Gordon Bennett (16th arr).

SPIRIT OF THE AGE

PAUL VALLELY

The medieval strikes a chord

THE VIDEO of *The Name of the Rose* sits oddly amid the tomes of medieval Latin on Denys Turner's shelves. Yet if it feels an anachronism, it is by no means an exception. In pop, there is the Medieval Baebes. In classical catalogues, the music of the Middle Ages is the largest growth area. In pulp fiction, there are the best-selling early medieval mysteries of Ellis Peters' modern-minded Brother Cadfael. All things medieval are now the fashion.

Hardly surprising, then, that the newest professor of divinity at Cambridge is to be a medievalist - Denys Turner, currently head of the theology department at Birmingham. So I went to his study there to ask what lessons we should draw from the current fad. Isn't interest in the Middle Ages just a lot of romantic escapism? He began, as academics do, by taking issue with my vocabulary. "The very term 'Middle Ages' suggests an impoverished period which merely connects two important ages - the Classical and the Renaissance," he began. "It assumes that in that degenerate and corrupt period - after Augustine in the fourth century and before Luther in the 16th - nothing important happened. But the idea of ignoring more than half of the entire history of Christianity is eccentric."

In any case, the medieval is very post-modern, if you focus on its tradition of mysticism rather than on the fact that life in those days was, in Hobbes's caricature, poor, nasty,

brutish and short. "There's a strong revival of interest in that area - Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Marguerite Kempe. People are groping back through modernism to that pre-linguistic, ineffable experience of transcendence which is indescribable in scientific language."

Professor Turner doesn't seem terribly keen on science - or, at least, on its current inability to look beyond the bounds of the provable. The real Middle Ages, he reckons, is the time between 1470 and 1970. "It is then that the longer traditions of European thought were interrupted by capitalism and science - and the Enlightenment insistence that there's a rational answer to everything, that there is a grand historical narrative leading to the present moment, and that through instruments of reason and technology, humans can master nature."

This is not what I expected from a medievalist, but it seems to make contemporary sense. Our new ecological awareness now questions the assumption that put humankind at the centre of the universe, displacing both God and nature. Our new consciousness of the fallibility of language has made us impatient with the cult-de-sac of epistemology. And the myth of progress has been the subject of increasing scepticism, especially in its tendency to equate technological progress with moral superiority.

Exactly, said Dr Turner. "Post-modernism - with its deconstructive,

sceptical, ironic, almost nihilistic suspicion - is saying that there are alternative ways of thinking to the 'common sense' of modernity."

So, ditch the romantic medievalism of Chesterton, harking back to a golden age of Christendom, and William Morris trying to recapture a pre-capitalist idyll. And ditch their New Age equivalents, which Turner dismisses as "the religion of late capitalism - entirely parasitic upon what it rejects, repeating the mistakes of established religion, only the second time as farce".

Instead, he said, there is something real to be discovered by reuniting the traditions of mysticism (which is subjective and hard to describe) with theology (which is conceptual and non-experiential). "Western Christianity has let the two fall apart. In our time, we are witnessing a sense that we need to bring them back together."

What the medievalists understood was that "only negative statements about God are true; affirmative ones are always insufficient and inappropriate," he said. That is why Meister Eckhart said "a person must take leave of God, in order to find God". And the greatest of the medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas, insisted that it is better to say that God does not exist than to say he does - for, as with all linguistic formulations, it can only diminish the Great Reality.

"It is only when you begin to push the bounds of language that you are doing real theology," said Turner.



Prof Turner regards the Renaissance as the true Middle Ages

"Language has to become disordered before we can begin to talk of God." Here, the links between contemporary views of language, meaning and value and those of the medieval mystics are manifold. Aquinas meets Wittgenstein not in what they said so much as in their approach. "How can you say that Christ is really present in the Eucharist? To do so, Aquinas has to develop a pretty sophisticated account of what language is, and how it hooks into the real world."

This has nothing to do with the God that modern atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, attack. It sets on one side the deist account of God as a bloke who is just bigger than everyone else and pushes everything else out of the way. People like Dawkins, says Turner,

have trouble with the idea that the world was created out of nothing, precisely because they use phrases such as "out of", which set the mind up to presume that even nothing is a funny kind of something. That is making the mistake of assuming that the universe is just a big place, even as he thinks God is just a big bloke.

"The big question for post-modernism is whether all this deconstruction offers a way forward, or is just in danger of disappearing up its own fundament," said the new professor of divinity. "The medievalists can, perhaps, help us sort out the one from the other. Of course, you can't restore their confidence in creation merely by manipulating language. But it may offer clues as to where we go next."

DAYS LIKE THESE

22 FEBRUARY 1914

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, author (pictured), describes his mother's funeral:

"I must rewrite the burial service; for there are things in it that are dearer than anything it has ever been read over, but I had it read not only because the parson must live by his fees, but because, with all its faults, it is the most beautiful thing that can be read as yet."

At the passage "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust", there was a little alteration of the words to suit the process. A door opened in the wall; and the violet coffin mysteriously passed out through it and vanished as it closed. I went behind the scenes at the end of the service and saw the real thing. I found there the violet coffin opposite another door; a real, unmistakable furnace door. When it lifted there was a plain little chamber of cement and firebrick. No heat. No noise. No roaring draught. No flame. No fuel. It looked cool, clean, sunny, though no sun could get



there. You would have walked in or put your hand in without misgiving. Then the violet coffin moved again and went in, feet first. And behold! The feet burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet-coloured lovely flame, smokeless and eager like pentecostal tongues, and as the whole coffin passed in it sprang into flame all over, and my mother became that beautiful fire."

24 FEBRUARY 1842

LORD SHAFTESBURY, philanthropist and reformer, writes in his diary:

"All [the Prime Minister, Sir Robert] Peel's affinities are

towards wealth and capital. His heart is manifestly towards the mill-owners; his lips occasionally for the operatives. What has he ever done or proposed for the working classes? His speech of last night was a signal instance of his tendencies."

He suppressed all the delinquencies of the manufacturers, betrayed the distress as severe but temporary. Now he might have said that no small portion of the suffering was caused by the forced immigration of families in 1836, reducing the already low wages, and aggravating the misery in the stagnation which followed. He might have said, too, that while we cannot interdict machinery, we ought not to be blind to its effects; it may cheapen goods for the consumer, but it impoverishes irrevocably thousands of workpeople, who can never resume their position, whatever be the activity of the trade.

In short, the speech was a transcript of his mind: cotton is everything, man nothing! IAN IRVINE

Singing the praises of Wales

I AM prepared to admit, in passing, the antiquity of the Welsh race. We have that on the authority of Shakespeare and on the authority of Mr Lloyd George. Mr Lloyd George is a member of the bardic circle.

He has told us - true, it was in a peroration - that nearly 2,000 years ago Suetonius Paulinus massacred, on the shores of Anglesey, a throng of priests and women while they were singing Welsh hymns. Six weeks ago, I heard the Dowlais choir singing Welsh hymns, and I do not think anyone on earth could have massacred them. They sang a hymn called "Jerusalem", and I think Paulinus would have knelt by their side had he heard them. The complaint I make against you is that in moments of economic excitement, such as we had in the coal strike last year, the sweet harmonies are broken and the songs are turned into slogans.

But of your antiquity there is no doubt. You are alleged to be directly descended from the Trojans. Geoffrey of Monmouth hath declared it. I venture to differ from the venerable Archdeacon. I am convinced that no Welshman would ever have allowed a wooden horse inside the city.

The Celtic memory was a long one, and to those who looked on the Welsh from over the border, it was a source of satisfaction to see that ancient as the race was, and ancient as was the

CLASSIC
PODIUM

From a speech by the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, delivered at the Saint David's Day banquet in Cardiff (1 MARCH 1927)

language, and great as was their history, they had what many ancient peoples had not: they had a present and a future.

You have a present, and no one can have the slightest acquaintance with the achievements of Wales in the last 25 years without recognising the idealism with which you have challenged the raw and stubborn facts

of life and striven to transmute them. Where I now stand is almost without parallel in these islands for foresight in planning the buildings required for a great and growing centre of population. You have housed here your municipal, county and national authorities in a way which stirs the imagination and exalts the self-respect of your people. They are a tribute to the untiring zeal of hundreds of the best men and women in Wales. You have a beautiful country in Wales. Don't let strangers spoil it for you, and don't sell it yourselves.

You have in Wales the Snowdon district, the city of St David and the bays beyond it; you have the Carnarvon peninsula, and just outside Wales there is the Forest of Dean. Isn't it worth thinking whether it may not be possible to convert some of these districts into national possessions, which can never be disfigured, which can never be built over, where it may be possible to go in my old age without having to listen to the blast of a steam whistle or the hoot of a motor-car?

Men who deny their national spiritual heritage in exchange for a vague and watery cosmopolitanism become less than men; they starve and dwarf their personalities; they turn into a sort of political eunuch. But if the instinct of nationality is natural, it needs always to be directed and often to be curbed. We must temper it with other loyalties.

Long and bitter was the fighting between Wales and England, but there came a day when, under the banner with the dragon, Henry Tudor marched across Wales and placed upon his brow the crown of England. From that day the Welsh began to work with the English, giving what they had to the common stock, and drawing from the common stock what they needed, while preserving their own nationality, their own language and their own fire. I cannot end better than by quoting to you words more eloquent than mine. They are the words of Ben Jonson to Queen Elizabeth.

"This country has always been fruitful of loyal hearts to Your Majesty, a very garden and seed plot of honest minds and men. What light of learning hath Wales sent forth from your schools? What industrious students of your law? What able ministers of your justice? Whence hath the Crown, in all times, better servants, more liberal of their lives and fortunes? I am glad to see it and to speak it, and though the nation be said to be unconquered and most loving liberty, yet it was never mutinous, but stout, valiant, courteous, hospitable, temperate, ingenious; capable of all good arts, most lovingly constant, charitable, great antiquaries, religious preservers of their gentry and genealogy, as they are zealous and knowing in religion."

THE SATURDAY ESSAY

It's no longer the story but the life that counts



KATHRYN HUGHES

With novels refusing to provide useful life maps, documentary has been obliged to step into the breach

THE BOOK by which Iris Murdoch is in danger of being most remembered is not by her at all. The obituaries that met her death this month were more inclined to lead with John Bayley's memoir of his late wife Iris than ever they were with one of her 27 novels. Tricky Murdoch classics such as *Under the Net*, a book which re-drew the possibilities of what the post-war English novel might achieve, retreated into the shadows cast by Bayley's intimate memoir of his wife's last years with Alzheimer's disease. In the days following her death it was Murdoch's miserable ending rather than her glorious achievements that tributes focused upon.

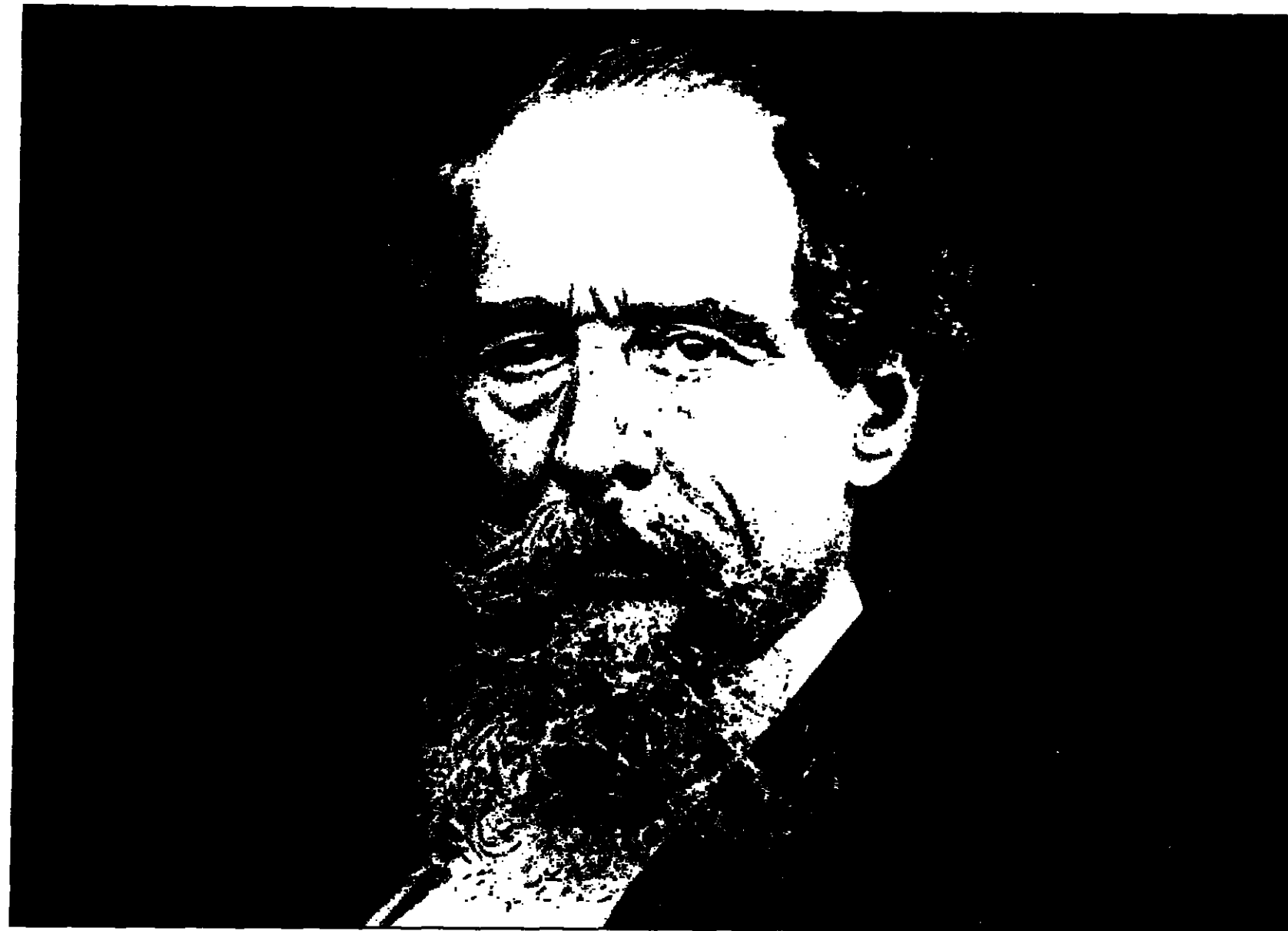
Of course, the irony of an Oxford philosopher losing her mind makes us want to think about the connections between life and art. But more than that was going on in the days following Murdoch's death. Old, pre-Bayley lovers were identified and their pictures printed; Murdoch's domestic arrangements were picked over. Her cheekbones, bicycle-riding and Irish inflections were all set down in detail. Murdoch's life - and her most private life at that - had become the real story.

Last year, almost as much biography was published as general fiction. The genre's growing popularity emerges from the current fascination with the real, or at least a highly mediated version of it, as shown by the popularity of magazines like *OK* and a rash of television docu-soaps. Blake Morrison's dad and newspaper columns about disappointing husbands all offer the possibility of getting close to another person's life and, in the process, our own. Comparisons can be made, contrasts noted. Measured against these templates the mess of your own divorce, anorexia or alcoholism starts to look positively normal. Reading about other people's lives is the equivalent of coming away from a session of Café Rouge girl-talk feeling positively sane and sane in comparison with your screwy friends.

Once upon a time, novels filled this function too. Victorian fiction created three-dimensional worlds with characters as solid as the furniture on which they sat. People a bit like you or me got themselves into scrapes, had adventures, died or won a fortune. A novel was counted a success if readers discussed the going-on as if they had really happened. In 1871 the nation worried about how Dorothea Brooke was going to manage as Mrs Casaubon, while two decades earlier many a solid paterfamilias got teary over the death of Jo the crossing-sweeper in *Bleak House*.

These days, by contrast, it is hard to get worked up about the fate of anyone who appears in a new novel. Three decades of post-modernism have left us with narrators who refuse to play God, characters who will not be read and plot lines that peter out on the road to nowhere. Modern literary fiction has invested all its considerable cleverness in trying to convince the reader that the world it describes never existed. And the characters, well, the characters never leave the page.

So with novels refusing to provide useful life maps, documentary has been obliged to step into the breach. But just as no one ever met a woman who was quite like Dorothea Brooke, so we don't want to be presented with the dilemmas of people exactly like ourselves. We need them to be the same but different, close enough to be familiar, far enough away to inspire or cau-



Charles Dickens: the great novelists of the 19th century gave the public three-dimensional characters as solid as the furniture on which they sat

tion. That's why BBC1's docu-soap *Puddington Green*, about a dreary corner of central London, has hit the button by having a transsexual star. *Lakesiders*, which similarly followed everyday shopping-mall folk, featured a girl in her journey from make-up counter to recording studio, a kind of Cinderella with too much slap.

And it's for exactly the same reason that we want our biographies - and our biographers - a little on the exotic side. Product recognition is vital, since publishers are naturally reluctant to pay advances for books about people no one has ever heard of. So the biographical subject needs to have written novels, won battles or painted pictures, while still having feet positively mired in clay. A lucky marriage, a bed hot or two, is just the thing to grab the reader's - and the publisher's - attention.

And, if no one has heard of either subject or biographer, there are ways of annexing other sources of celebrity. Not much was known about Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, until HarperCollins published Amanda Foreman's biography last year. But the fact that the 18th-century duchess was born a Spencer, endured a painful marriage and became hooked on a flashy, trashy lifestyle gave her a familiarity that made the most cautious reader feel like investing the decidedly odd sum of £19.99. Likewise Foreman's own picaresque life story - as the daughter of *High Noon*'s screenwriter Carl Foreman, and an early academic failure - handed her publicists plenty to play with. And, as *The Guardian* pointed out recently, the girl's own good looks hardly harmed. Out of this cluster of extra contexts a commercial blockbuster was forged from what had started life as Foreman's DPhil.

In this gossipy environment, biographers naturally feel under pressure to come up with juicy revelations about their subjects. At times it seems as if there is a kind of psychological striptease going on, with the biographer acting as MC. The recent spate of books on Virginia Woolf, for instance, concentrate on the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her half-brothers, the Duckworth boys. Several American studies pretty much read Woolf as a

psychiatric case history, and reduce her novels to a set of symptoms. This sudden interest might be understandable if the details of the Duckworths' fumbings had only just come to light. But Woolf herself gave away the information in the early Twenties, during two papers delivered to the Bloomsbury group's Memoir Club, as well as in numerous chats and letters.

It is not the facts that changed over the intervening 70 years, but the context in which they came to be written about. In the late Eighties and Nineties, sexual abuse gained a new resonance in the wake of scandals in Britain and America. Histories of the family had long surmised that girls - and boys - had been "interfered with" for centuries, but it was only in the light of this new hysteria that a recognisable pathology of sexual abuse emerged, which could then be applied retrospectively. Hardly surprising, then, that incidents of child molestation started to pop up not only in biographies of Virginia Woolf - where the proof was strong - but in plenty of other cases where it was not.

And proof will always be the problem when it comes to reconstructing private lives. In the case of those long dead, the evidence will be scattered, though the chances of being landed with a libel suit are slight. And time changes meanings. A series of friendly letters written a century ago may be just that - friendly, not adulterous. It is hard to prove a sexual affair without the evidence of the bedlinen.

Even when all seems clear, a tag of doubt must always remain. When working on my recent biography of George Eliot (Fourth Estate) I looked at a diary written in 1851 by her landlord, John Chapman. Chapman already had a wife and a resident mistress, and it was his habit to note down in his diary whenever he had sex with either of them. One weekend in January the initial "M" (presumably for Marian, Eliot's real Christian name) appears twice on Chapman's pages. I took this to mean that they made love, a shocking revelation for a married man and a single woman in the early Victorian period. The hypothesis builds on what we already know about Chapman's promiscuity and Eliot's vul-

nerability to any man who wanted her. Contemporary gossip certainly had them down as lovers, and even whispered that there was a child born from the affair. But in the last analysis we can never know exactly what that scribbled "M" signifies in Chapman's diary. He may simply have been making notes about his mother.

Similar problems arise when biographers make judgements about their subjects' most secret habits and desires. Lives from 50 years, let alone two centuries, ago look odd when viewed through the lens of current preoccupations. Sometimes this works in the subject's favour. When Margaret Forster suggested in her 1993 biography of Daphne du Maurier that the novelist had enjoyed an affair with the actor Gertrude Lawrence, it did nothing to harm du Maurier's reputation. In fact, the idea of a little recreational lesbianism only added lustre to du Maurier, who was in danger of being written off as an eccentric Cornish recluse, interested only in boats and dogs.

But in other cases, the changing context can do lasting damage. Andrew Motion's fine biography of Philip Larkin came out in the same year as Forster's book on du Maurier. But the misogyny and racism that Motion reported in his subject's life hardly chimed well with sensibilities in the early Nineties. The book's revelations caused fuss and bother, and Larkin's reputation emerged subtly changed. While nothing could harm his status as a poet - which was hardly Motion's intention anyway - never again could his verse be read with such guiltless ease.

Male biographical subjects suffer most from this habit of viewing past lives through contemporary concerns. This is a feminised age, which values nurturing, co-operation, and invested personal relationships. So any subject who displays a range of pre-Seventies masculine behaviour, including promiscuity, alcoholism or violence, is bound to come off badly.

Female subjects, by contrast, do well in the game of shifting contexts. Even women who lived 150 years ago can be claimed as Bridget Jones prototypes, attractive in a messed-up sort of way. Running after im-

possible men, getting much too thin and dreaming of stardom, are the kinds of self-loathing behaviours that a Nineties sensibility is happy to spot and celebrate in its Victorian foremothers.

There are signs, though, that biographers may be changing the way they conceive of themselves and their art. The idea of the biographer as the knower and disposer of someone else's secrets has started to seem tawdry. For if we accept that there can never be a final, authorised version of a particular life, then the status of Life Writer (as the academy now has it) must be in some way diminished. Godlike claims of omnipotence, including the promise of secret-spilling, now sound like so much pompous clutter.

A recent spate of books suggests that more thoughtful biographers are facing up to the limitations of their own power. Claire Tomalin, who has written on Katherine Mansfield and Jane Austen as well as on great men's mistresses, has always acknowledged the lacunae in her narrative, the places where she simply "doesn't know" what happened next. Hermione Lee's 1996 *Virginia Woolf* sets out parallel hypotheses about the same incidents and refuses to adjudicate between them. Geoff Dyer's recent book on DH Lawrence, *Out of Sheer Rage*, is more concerned with what he doesn't know about his subject than with what he does.

Where once the best biographers rushed to divert the reader's attention from the places where their arguments became patchy, these days they are only too delighted to wear their frailties as a badge of honour. The more gaps there are, they seem to say, the more truthful the rest of my narrative must be. What remains to be seen is whether readers take to this new mood of doubt and uncertainty. For if you're the sort of person who likes - and needs - to believe that there is a place where Real Life happens, then the new generation of "I'm not sure" biographies is likely to leave you feeling very edgy indeed.

The writer's biography *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* is published by Fourth Estate, price £20

BAROMETER

SEAN O'GRADY

Cheatdown

Serious allegations about the probity of the makers of *Countdown* have been made by Matthew Parris. Mr Parris claims that celebrity guests are given the answers to anagrams through their ear-pieces by the production team. At least they aren't asked to impersonate transvestites or serial adulterers. Channel 4 admits that guests get help. This is a bit upsetting. Some of us considered Richard Whiteley, *Countdown*'s anchorman, to be the only broadcaster we could trust. Could his fabled wit not be his own? This is the man, after all, who said in an interview with *The Independent*'s own Deborah Ross that he likes living in Wensleydale because "Americans never know where Wensleydale is, so I tell them it's between Tulseleydale and Thursleydale." No one, let us pray, had to help him with that particular gag.



Roach

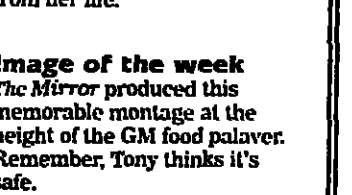
city Scientists at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have discovered that cockroaches can run 3ft per second (the equivalent of a human hitting 90mph) and twist and turn 25 times at the same moment. Did you also know that: females mate only once, producing about 280 offspring; roaches carry up to 40 diseases; and the median number of roaches found in a low-income apartment in Gainesville, Florida, is 13,000? They even eat GM food. How about a pet? The roach of choice these days is the Madagascan hissing cockroach. It grows to 2-3in long and 1in wide. It hisses by forcibly expelling air through breathing pores when disturbed, and during courtship and aggressive encounters. "There is nothing like the purring of a contented pet hisser on your belly", as one fan says. Just so long as it doesn't get frisky.



Barely adequate

A Babylonian tale from Hollywood. Dr Steven Hofflin, a cosmetic surgeon, has been at the centre of a court case this week. It was claimed that Sylvester Stallone asked Dr Hofflin to make his unconscious girlfriend's breasts "big, but kinda perky, kinda like a 17-year-old". Stallone issued his instructions when he walked, unwitting, into the operating theatre where Angela Everhart was anaesthetised. A Sly move, but hardly a wise one. When Miss Everhart discovered what had happened, she had the implants and Stallone removed from her life.

Image of the week
The Mirror produced this memorable montage at the height of the GM food palaver. Remember, Tony thinks it's safe.



MY WEEK

ROSS McDONALD, MARKETING MANAGER FOR LONDON ARENA'S BRIT AWARDS SHOW



Ross McDonald of the Brits

Sunday
Dreaded Valentine's Day. I go to the gym to try to avoid the whole issue. Today we are finalising the press office and laying out the tables. The final technical preparation is being done; there are several artists in the building today, including Robbie Williams. Preparations started last week. The laying of the carpets took two days; 3,690 chairs had to be brought in, and we needed parking for 200 limousines. There are 150 security staff and 300 waiting and catering staff and we have ordered 5,000 bottles of champagne.

Monday
I am running around chasing pictures for our corporate brochure all morning and then have a meeting with a promoter from Disney on Ice.

I organise some radio interviews to talk about hosting the Brit awards. Today I'm really starting to feel the buzz. There is live music banging out everywhere - with less than 24 hours to go the pressure is really on. I leave work at seven, go home to watch *EastEnders* and relax.

Tuesday
This is the big day. I go to the gym and arrive in work at nine. The place is absolutely manic, lorries everywhere, and I can't get a parking space. The technical preparation has been going on since seven and we are now virtually ready to go. The full dress rehearsals start at one. Whitney Houston, The Corrs, Cleopatra, Steps and Billy are all here. In the afternoon I run through procedures for the customer ser-

vices desk and check the limo and taxi drivers' parking arrangements are set. Crowds start to arrive at about two. Last year there were protesters, but not this year luckily.

At five I get changed into my black suit and put on my make-up. The doors open at six for the dinner guests. This is when the real buzz kicks in. I spend the first hour down in the main foyer dealing with inquiries about seating. I am surprised by the number of people who have forgotten their tickets. At about

eight, there is a tannoy announcement to round up the press and the photographers. I go up to our VIP box to greet our clients. I spend most of the night flitting backwards and forwards. Everyone seems to be having a really good time.

When the Eurythmics play, everyone is hopping around. Whitney Houston is great and it's really moving when Bono and Muhammad Ali launch Jubilee 2000. It sends shivers up my spine. The show finishes at eleven and

I stay for the big after-show party. There are about 4,000 people and it's fairly wild. I have a couple of glasses of wine and manage to get home around five after losing my keys.

Wed
In work by about ten feeling as if I'm in *The Twilight Zone*. I go to our designers in Covent Garden to finalise the corporate brochure. It's pretty fraught because we are working to a really tight deadline. Everyone is calling me every five minutes to ask how the Brit Awards went. I leave at about seven and go for a drink and a bite to eat.

Thursday
I'm in the office for about nine. It's all pretty manic. There are loads of technical guys loading up equip-

ment. I have to call in a photographer to take pictures of the front of the arena for our brochure. There is loads of cleaning and tidying up to be done after the Brits. I need to make arrangements for The Corrs who are playing on Saturday. I leave work early today but my phone continues to ring with work calls all afternoon.

Friday
I check that all the Brit awards posters are down and The Corrs ones are now up. The buzz for The Corrs has started but I am hoping today will be a quiet day. It's the first time I've looked out and not seen lots of people everywhere. It's a bit of an anti-climax now all the carpets and banners have gone and all the hype has finished.

The British dance establishment wants control over the teaching of Latin rhythm. It faces fierce resistance. By Spencer Bright

The fight for the soul of salsa

You can hear the rat-tat-tat of the salsa beat being stomped out with ever more emphatic determination as each opposing camp takes up its position. It is the sound of the burgeoning British salsa dance scene as it splits in two. If they ever made a movie about it they might call it "Dirty Dancing". At stake are the spoils from and control of salsa dance teaching in this country, and its commercial spin-offs. Some salsa teachers want to link up with the long-established British dance scene through the United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing (UKA), which is tainted in some people's eyes by its links with moribund ballroom dancing. Others are more sympathetic to a nascent association of salsa-teachers that stresses cultural purity through an adherence to salsa's Latin roots.

The once nearly lost art of partner or social dancing in Britain has been undergoing a steady revival for about a decade. We are becoming ever keener on dances such as cecoré (a French form of five), line dancing, tango and, most popular of all, salsa. In every major city and in numerous towns throughout the country salsa has taken root, appealing to urban twentysomethings and middle-aged housewives alike. You come across salsa in *The Archers*, where friends Ruth Archer and Usha Gupta attended salsa classes and a salsa club. And in early March the cast of *EastEnders* will be seen learning how to dance salsa. An estimated 10,000 people attend regular weekly classes in London.

The schism cuts straight through a salsa scene that, if you'll excuse the pun, is still finding its feet. All salsa dance teachers want to reap the benefits of increasing popularity; they are divided on how best to do it.

On one side are those who believe that the industry must be regulated in order to safeguard the livelihoods of teachers, the standard of dancing and the safety of participants. On the other are those want-

ing a looser framework that permits diversity and does not fall under the control of the larger dance movement, while staying as close to the clubbing scene as possible.

Each camp straddles the Latin/Anglo divide, but the racial/cultural issue has on occasion been used as a weapon. The ballroom-linked UKA intended to launch its teaching qualification - and its bid for control - last November at the Paragon Hotel in Earl's Court, London. They had to abandon a public meeting because of intemperate interruptions. One heckler shouted at Paul Harris, a UKA committee member, "You're no right to be here; you can't dance; you're white." It's not a view either side would wish to associate with.

If ballroom teachers want to teach salsa they need to come to the clubs; they need to understand the culture

but it shows how high emotions ran. What was billed by the UKA as "Salsa - the Main Event" was just one of many mostly ballroom dances featured at their London Congress. There were cups, medals and trophies proudly displayed there, the very paraphernalia that raises the hackles of the salsa purists. As one respected teacher put it: "We had the feeling we didn't belong."

Joseph Davids, a promoter of Latin shows and salsa events, is committed to neither side, but he criticised the UKA for its disastrous attempt to win over the 300 salsa teachers invited to the Paragon Hotel. "They had a whole array of medals and awards on one wall and everybody walked in and said 'ballroom'. And they said, 'we're not, we're not'; but there were all these ballroom medals there and there were all these guys sitting around in their pink suits with dress shirts. They did a show, a cabaret,



Salsa has taken the UK by storm, appealing to urban twentysomethings and middle-aged housewives alike **Tony Kyriacou**

with lots of people jumping up and doing lots of ballet kicks, and that's not salsa."

There is a warning from history. Latin dance was first introduced to Britain in the Forties directly from Cuba, by Doris Lavelle and her partner Monsieur Pierre. But it became bastardised and is now known as British Latin American, having been slowed down for British tastes.

Paul Harris, a disciple of Doris Lavelle, says he has been a salsa fan since the Seventies. He is a choreographer and has written a book notating salsa dance steps. This has controversially become the

UKA's guide syllabus for its recently instituted salsa examinations for teachers, though one wag damned it as "critically unclaimed".

Harris explains: "Because I know dance notation, and because I know authentic Cuban social dance and what went wrong with it, the UKA approached me to notate salsa. The reason for that was because the British Dance Council were getting inundated with calls from people asking for salsa. And they weren't allowed to give out telephone numbers of unqualified teachers."

He claims that he has suffered "serious racial abuse" that would not

be tolerated if it were anti-Latin. Harris was a key player in bringing three of the most respected salsa teachers into the embrace of the UKA - Nelson Batista, Elder Sanchez and Xiomara Granados - all of whom have been awarded honorary fellowships.

"What people fail to see is that by joining the UKA we are getting recognised and giving it some value," says Batista, who came to this country 12 years ago from his native Cuba. "All the Latin people I know in London, especially those involved with the Latin scene, they couldn't put a sandcastle together.

We are still very Latin in that way. "I prefer to be part of an official scene. The UKA can't teach me salsa, but they can teach me a lot about organisation. There are more than 100 so-called salsa teachers in the UK... but a lot of them haven't got a clue."

Batista believes that about half of what he calls the decent salsa teachers in the UK want to join, and disputes charges that linking up with the UKA will lead to the "ballroomisation" of salsa. "The more we expose salsa to an existing dance scene, the better we get." He is happy for salsa to adopt the ways of

mainstream dance, with its medals, certificates and diplomas.

One of Batista's colleagues at the UKA is Ansell Chezan, who started teaching ballroom dancing in 1966. "We are not touching the salsa movements at all, otherwise it would be bastardised, as the rumba and the samba have been," he insists. "It's their teaching abilities that we are concerned with... some of these people can't even count the music."

Quality, according to the opposing salsa teachers, will look after itself in a free market, where poor teachers are soon driven out of business. Their primary fear is being dictated to by an organisation they see as unrepresentative; that and the trickle-down effect of ballroom dance teachers taking a salsa qualification as a means of earning a better living, and dominating a scene that owes its vitality to grassroots clubs.

Elissa Ernst, born in Colombia, has been teaching salsa for 12 years, and is leading the opposition to the UKA from her base in Reading.

"Salsa is not just a dance," she says. "It is a way of life rooted in Latin culture." She believes that introducing a system of competition ignores the fundamental ethos of the dance. "We are very, very concerned that the most valuable aspect of salsa, which is the feeling and the freedom of expression and the spontaneity of the dance, is going to be lost. They are going to pollute the natural feeling of salsa."

"If ballroom dancers want to teach salsa they need to come to the clubs; they need to understand a bit of the culture before passing a test and starting to teach."

Ernst and fellow independently minded salsa teachers are this weekend meeting in London to set up the rival Professional Association of Salsa Dance Teachers.

"The movement is split," she says. "I hope the problems we are facing are not going to affect the salsa scene. We Latin people feel incredibly flattered that British people want to learn salsa. We are very glad about that, provided they do not dilute its authenticity."

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TOMORROW IN

THE INDEPENDENT
ON SUNDAY

ILLUMINATIONS
ALAN DE BOTTON LOOKS
AT PHOTOGRAPHS OF LIGHT

MY FATHER'S GREAT WAR
BY ROBERT FISK

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- ★ Goodness Gracious Me
- ★ Harry Enfield and Chums

Gp Capt Peter Johnson

PETER JOHNSON was reputed to have led more bomber raids in the Second World War – and some of the most dangerous and successful ones – than any other commander. Yet after the war and until the day of his death (when he was at work on his fourth book, a novel) he made a detailed and prolonged study of the effects of this form of warfare. This made him unpopular in the Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence. Neither Bill Clinton nor Tony Blair would, it seems, agree with his views as they look towards Baghdad and Kosovo.

Bruce Kent, on the other hand, hailed his 1996 memoir *The Withered Garland*, which sets out his case (it is subtitled "Reflections and Doubts of a Bomber"), as the book of the century.

The son of Captain Robert Johnson RN, killed in September 1914, at the beginning of the First World War when his ship, HMS Cressy, was torpedoed, Peter inherited his father's abhorrence of personal publicity. This endeared him to his friends but not to his publishers. This reticence, uncharacteristic of an RAF officer of his rank, denied him the recognition as a war hero that would otherwise have been his. Even his memoir was silent about most of his exploits, and such recognition as he received was due to the insistence of others.

The Johnson family emigrated to upstate New York in the reign of King George II, who in 1755 bestowed on the head of the family the intriguing title General Sir William Johnson Bt. of New York. (The title is now held by Peter's nephew, the seventh in succession, the yachting writer Sir Peter Johnson.) The second baronet raised a regiment in the War of Independence but, fighting on the losing side, the family had to become temporarily asylum seekers in Ontario.

They duly returned to Johnsonstown, named after them, as also is nearby Fort Johnson. When Peter Johnson visited Johnsonstown at the age of 88 his hosts persuaded him to be driven down Main Street to the equivalent of a ticker-tape reception before a cheering crowd.

His erudite later life was scarcely to be predicted. After a childhood to which only a dual son might now aspire, and an unimpressive school career, he had a spell at Dartmouth.

The Navy, though, was not for him, and he turned to London and was attached to a firm of chartered accountants. Far too intelligent to become one of Bertie Wooster's companions, he none the less would have been one of his contemporaries as he went the round of deb's dances, night-clubs, weekend parties in country houses and the other delights on offer to a debonaire young man with little work to do.

Reading the long indictment against the Nazi leaders, he put down his glass of wine. 'I am a war criminal too,' he said

Despairing of a pointless life, he set off for Australia to take up sheep farming, and learnt how to castrate lambs with his teeth. But England called and in 1929 he came back to another desk job, for a grocery manufacturer, where he was particularly involved in a new product, a "singularity nasty breakfast cereal" called "Aviator Wheat Flakes". He decided to join the RAF and was commissioned in 1930, and trained as a fighter pilot. He was proficient at sports and played cricket, squash and real tennis for the RAF.

Then one day the "Peace Ballot" questionnaire from the League of Nations Union arrived; Johnson and his wife Joan, whom he had married in 1932, both signed it, as did some 25 per cent of the British population. Another world war was coming, he had decided, but here was some small hope that another mass slaughter might be avoided. When Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1936 and the League of Nations resolved to act against him, Johnson cheered; and he cheered again when his fighter squadron was ordered to

Aden in readiness to support the Abyssinians. Then came the Hoare-Lavell Pact and a crestfallen fighter pilot had to return to England, disillusioned.

When war came he was told he was too old for operational duties and sent to Training Command as chief instructor. This was not to his liking; he felt it his duty to be up in the air with the others who were going to risk their lives. His charm and persistence eventually got him to Bomber Command and to Number 5 Group.

All the qualities for command of an operational unit were proved to be his. He had immense charisma, bravery and a gift for giving praise in the right measure and at the appropriate time. He also knew that a large fighting unit going into action several times a week with inevitable casualties could not succeed without discipline and a high standard of efficiency that he had to set himself.

After every raid he had the painful duty of writing to the families of aircrew who had failed to return. Despite the loss of so many from his station his morale never faltered, which owed much to his own qualities; he himself led all the raids under his command.

There were lighter moments, though. His much beribboned uniform had a magnetic effect on the girls. One claimed that having seen him at the station in Grantham she followed him into an empty compartment of the train and by the time they reached Peterborough – a mere 20 minutes away – matters had advanced as far as was practical.

Many years later, as a widower in his late eighties, the magnetism survived. Living in a stately home converted into flats, he never seemed to go downstairs without passing the come-hither of another resident happening to go up to her room. "My immediate family have had nine divorces," he announced, which served his purpose in more ways than one.

After the war, at the request of Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, he made a detailed report on the effect of the aerial bombardment of German cities. One of the most telling arguments against it, he said, was a personal

one. Hitler ordered that any soldier, even on the Russian and North African fronts, whose home had been bombed should have a fortnight's compassionate leave. The consequence was that when he returned he redoubled his efforts against Allied forces, and persuaded his comrades that they were fighting a callous enemy who bombed their parents and grandparents in the middle of the night.

In 1946 Johnson was asked to attend the Nuremberg trials. Given a copy of the long indictment against the Nazi leaders, he took it away to read over a picnic lunch at the lake-side. Before reaching the final count he raised his glass of wine; about to take another sip, his eyes caught the first few words and as he read on he replaced the untouched wine on the ground. "I am a war criminal too," he said to himself.

War crimes the relevant Article defined as

Atrocities or offences against persons or property constituting violations of the laws or customs of war, including but not limited to, murder, ill-treatment or

deportation to slave labour or for another purpose, of civilian population from occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons in the sea, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity.

Furthermore, liability was barely limited:

Any person, without regard to nationality or the capacity in which he acted, is deemed to have committed a crime... if he was (a) an accessory to the commission of any such crime or ordered or abetted the same, or (b) took a consenting part therein, or (c) was connected with plans or enterprises involving its commission.

After that there were more occasions when friends were told of Johnson's misgivings. It was not for some 25 years that one of them urged him to put these thoughts on paper. The result was two books which no other RAF officer could have or would have written. The first was *Neutrality: a policy for Britain* (1985) and the second, written when he was 87, *The Withered Garland*. (He also wrote *The Hinge of Op-*

portunity: a security system for Europe, 1992, and articles for *The New European* on defence and foreign policy issues.)

The Withered Garland contains a vivid account of life in Bomber Command; it cogently conveys the tensions and conflicts among those who decided the strategy, including Winston Churchill, Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Foxley-Norris, in a foreword, characterises Johnson's "gift for philosophical analysis" of this branch of modern warfare.

To the end Johnson remained fit and active, mentally as much as physically, and planning yet another adventure abroad – North Africa he had in mind this March. At the time of his death he was the oldest member of the MCC.

RICHARD BODY

Peter Warren Johnson, air force officer: born 13 November 1908; DSO 1945; OBE 1954; married 1935 Joan Hare (one son, one daughter; marriage dissolved 1961); 1962 Anne Bower (died 1987); died Albury, Surrey 12 February 1999.



Johnson, a reluctant war hero, changed his mind about the effectiveness of aerial bombardment

Herman Herst Jnr

HERMAN HERST Jnr made himself the world's best-known philatelic auctioneer of the mid-20th century. He died after a protracted fight against Parkinson's disease which only a year ago finally led to his contacting friends around the world to say he would no longer answer letters.

For a man who always replied within 24 hours, this was a sad decision; "Pat" Herst (he was born on St Patrick's Day, 1909) relished the stimulus both of unexpected finds among items sent for auction and in expressing his always outspoken, often outrageous views in letters and in his long-lived house journal – *Herst's Outbursts*.

He graduated from Reed College, in Portland, Oregon, in 1931, gained an MA at the University of Oregon, and worked briefly as a newspaperman. With the Depression biting he soon lost the job and, lacking the rail fare, "rode the rods" to New York, where he worked as a delivery boy for a Wall Street municipal bond house at \$12 a week.

That didn't last; Herst spent his lunch hours with stamp dealers on Nassau Street. America's philatelic centre, and loved to tell how he cornered supplies of new stamp issues, made money for colleagues, and speedily departed to start his own business. Unlike most dealers, he was ready to share a tip with readers, and helped many a collector to a better understanding of the stamp market.

Working both in Nassau Street and from his home in Shrub Oak, New York, Herst created a "local stamp" to pay postage as his Alsatian dog carried mail to the post office: envelopes bearing these triangular "Shrub Oak locals" are eagerly sought by collectors.

His first wife, Ingeborg Adam, whom he married in Berlin, encouraged him to travel widely at a time when few other US dealers realised what opportunities lay off their own shores. His adventures, especially around Communist Eastern Europe and in the still undeveloped Far East, made good copy for his *New York Times* features, for magazine articles, and for his 18 books: *Nassau*



Herst: 'unhinged'

Street (1960) was the only work of its kind to sell over 100,000 copies.

Herst's first wife died in 1954, and in 1957 he married Ida Busch. Still writing when he retired to Florida in 1973, he was often invited to address meetings when he would uncover rare "finds" from his hosts' attics. In 1982 his prolific writings brought him an honorary LLD from William Penn College. He won every philatelic award in the United States – including Most Distinguished Philatelist award of the American Philatelic Society – and several in Britain, and in 1994 was voted Man of the Year by the American Stamp Dealers Association. He served on philatelic juries in India, Taiwan and Britain, and as a Commissioner represented US exhibitors at many international exhibitions.

Like most informed dealers, Herst was also a collector: his study of the stamps and postal history of early Great Britain was frequently exhibited and earned many awards. There's an old philatelic joke, "Stamp dealers never die, they just become unhinged" (the perfect condition of a rare stamp); although he was confined to a wheelchair in later years, many a collector will remember him carving around London stamp and ephemera shows, his wheels a constant danger to others, avidly snapping up what he knew to be bargains.

In 1994 Herst's home was burgled and he lost all his awards, a sad blow. He founded the Herman Herst Jnr Philatelic Library at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, and was active in the American Civil Liberty Union, Citizens for Religious Liberty, A 32 Mason and a Shriner; he was also a board member of Temple Beth El in Boca Raton.

Pat Herst's reputation will live on; many of his writings are still reprinted in magazines today, to bring his decades of experience to a new readership. Even when he is wrong, his writing is readable and amusing.

KENNETH R. LAKE

Hermann Herst, stamp collector and dealer: born 17 March 1909; married first Ingeborg Adam (died 1954; one son, one daughter), second 1957 Ida Busch (one stepson, one stepdaughter); died Boca Raton, Florida 31 January 1999.

Yu Qiuli



Yu: 'I have gone through nine deaths'

Pepperfoto

YU QIULI was deputy prime minister of China from 1975 until 1982 and was a member of the Chinese Communist Party Politburo.

He was one of the last of the Long March generation of Chinese leaders who survived the epic journey by Communist forces across China in the mid-1930s to become an important figure in the administrations of Mao Tse-tung and Deng Xiaoping. Yu was a soldier-bureaucrat who founded China's modern oil industry and helped Deng modernise his army.

By the time of his death, Yu had ceased to be one of the central figures in Chinese policy-making for more than a decade. But he had continued, like other former leaders of his generation, to keep up to date with state affairs by carrying out frequent inspection tours around the country. He was particularly involved in efforts to promote the economies of the former base areas of the Communist guerrilla armies, many of which are still mired in poverty.

Yu's background was typical of a Communist guerrilla-turned-leader. He was born in 1914, three years after the collapse of China's last imperial dynasty, into a poor peasant family. By the age of 14 he had taken part in a peasant uprising. At 16 he joined the Communist Party.

Yu was among the tens of thousands of guerrillas and their supporters who from 1934 joined the Long March in an effort to break through the nationalist blockades around the Communist base in the south. In 1936, he was injured in the arm during a skirmish with pursuing nationalist forces. He continued on the journey north over treacherous terrain. Nine months later, after he had completed a journey of thousands of miles in terrible pain, his arm was amputated. "I am a man who has gone through nine deaths," Yu told the American journalist Harrison Salisbury in 1984.

During China's Anti-Japanese War of 1937-1945 and the subsequent civil war, Yu was a leading political commissar and training officer in the Communist forces. After the Communist victory in 1949, he became the head of a military academy and thereafter held various posts in the central military command, including the head of the

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Yu: 'I have gone through nine deaths'

Pepperfoto

Yu's financial affairs. He rose to the rank of lieutenant-general.

In 1958, Yu was appointed minister of the petroleum industry. The move thrust him into a far more prominent role in the fledgling Communist government. In the following year, the discovery of huge oil reserves in Daqing in the desolate wastes of north-eastern China gave

him a mission that on its own would ensure his place in Communist China's history books. Yu's task was to turn Daqing into a model of Chinese industry.

Under Yu's direction, the mosquito-infested marshland – in winter an expanse of ice – was transformed into China's biggest oil production centre. Daqing was written into the Communist lexicon as a name synonymous with proletarian heroism. It produced the famous Maoist icon Iron Man Wang, who, in order to stop a blow-out, leapt into a pool of liquid concrete to mix it using his own body. After his success in Daqing, Yu went on to establish several more major production centres. In 1964, China declared itself self-sufficient in oil.

That year Yu was moved into the most important government ministry related to the economy, the State Planning Commission, as deputy chief. In 1965, Mao made him the top drafter of the third Five Year Plan and put him in charge of relocating major industries to the remote hinterland of south-western China. Despite the claim of his official biographer that Yu suffered severe persecution during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, he appears to have suffered less harm than many of his colleagues. In 1975, he was appointed deputy prime minister, as was Deng.

After the death of Mao in 1976, Yu was promoted to the ruling Politburo. He was a member of what is commonly referred to as the "petroleum faction", a group of senior officials who advocated using the profits from petroleum exports to finance high technology imports from the West. These officials were essentially conservative Stalinists in their economic thinking, favouring central planning and heavy industry – a strategy that clashed with that of the ascendant Deng.

As Deng's political fortunes rose in the late 1970s, those of the petroleum faction waned. Yu was forced to make a self-criticism after the collapse of a Japanese-made oil rig in the Bohai Gulf in 1979. He was transferred from the chairmanship of the State Planning Commission to the less high profile post of head of the State Energy Commission.

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THE DECISION of Pete Myers to leave the BBC while at the height of his popularity robbed listeners to the African Service and what is now the World Service of one of the most innovative and magnetic broadcasters to grace the international airwaves.

In the mid-1960s, as the first presenter of the African Service's controversially revamped breakfast programme, *Good Morning Africa*, Myers was an immediate hit with the huge new audience which had just been opened up by the mass-marketing of transistors and, particularly in West Africa, by the start of the BBC's Atlantic relay station on Ascension Island. Within months, he was being accorded pop-star treatment whenever he arrived on tours to meet his fans in person.

Pete Myers was born in 1939 in Bangalore of Anglo-Indian parents but as he grew older enjoyed shrouding his origins in mystery. Consequently, and much to his delight, few

people knew whether he was a Latin American, or an exotic blend of English, German, Jewish, Lebanese and Chinese. His father had in fact worked on the Indian railways.

Myers's feel for Africa resulted from his arrival in Ghana in 1957, around the time of independence. His broadcasting career began unexpectedly in Accra when he was 17. He had got to know the presenter of a jazz programme who allowed him to listen in the studio while the show was being broadcast. Then came the day when the presenter remembered, just as he was about to go on air, that he had left his script at home. Dashing out of the building to retrieve it, he was knocked down and killed. The panic-stricken producer had no choice but to ask the teenage Myers to take over.

Myers did so with such natural assurance that after five years he became Ghana's top music DJ and radio personality, and a favourite of

the country's president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah.

Away from the microphone, Myers pursued a parallel career as one of the founders of what subsequently became Ghana's National Theatre. During the Congo crisis, he and his companions risked their lives entertaining UN troops in Katanga. As Myers like to recount, the high spots of his thespian activity were taking the part of Elvis Presley in a musical called *Pick Me a Paw-paw* and playing Hamlet in Moscow at Nkrumah's behest.

Leaving Accra for London in the mid-1960s, he was snapped up to become the presenter of *Good Morning Africa*. In stark contrast to what had gone before, his resonant baritone and slick mid-Atlantic informality soon made him a household name throughout the continent.

A year or so later, while increasing his workload at Bush House, he became one of the founding pre-

senters of Radio 1's *Late Night Extra*. But with a restricted playlist, and without the freedom to indulge his sometimes anarchic sense of humour, he failed to make the same impression on his domestic listeners. However, at the beginning of the 1970s, as a result of his spectacular success with African audiences, Myers was entrusted with transforming *Good Morning Africa* into a flagship breakfast show for the world.

He presented *The Morning Show*, with its mixture of pop, politics and personalities, four days a week, and at the weekends hosted *PM*, his own show-biz interview programme. His treatment of celebrities like Peggy Lee, Shirley Bassey and Ingrid Bergman – his favourite – heralded that of Michael Parkinson on BBC TV. Myers was thrown by Dame Edna Everage, for once impersonated across the microphone by a dapper Barry Humphries in suit, monocle and trilby.

Having broken the mould of broadcasting at Bush House, Myers felt he needed a change of scene and went to Lebanon to become the manager and resident impresario of a nightclub, the Crazy Horse Saloon. Unfortunately, he arrived just before the outbreak of the civil war.

Bombed out of Beirut, he returned to London to find that *The Morning Show* had been relaunched as *Network Africa* and a new presenter, Hilton Fyfe from Sierra Leone, had taken his place. Through ex-colleagues, he found work at Radio Nedergard, in Hilversum. There he produced and presented programmes in the Asian, African and English sections and eventually took over the helm of one of its most popular programmes, *Happy Station*.

Norman Bluhm

THOSE WHO despise the Establishment need not be surprised to later find themselves unestablished. Norman Bluhm had little time for games of fame and fortune and no time for the machinations of the commercial art world; it had just as little time for him.

The importance or, more importantly, the excellence of Bluhm's oeuvre is an open secret amongst several successive generations of American critics, poets, curators and writers, but such clandestine acclaim guarantees little. If Bluhm cannot be memorialised here as a genuinely important painter, he can at least be honoured as a paradigmatic figure of one of the significant cultural shifts of the 20th century, from the School of Paris to New York's Abstract Expressionists.

Bluhm's trajectory was so archetypal of an artistic era (whilst obviously being enjoyably unique if not eccentric) that it snatches of a biopic in the making. He was born in Chicago in 1921, but spent six years as a child with his mother's family in Lucca, in Italy. Back in Chicago, he became Miles van der Robe's youngest architecture student at the age of 16, such training perhaps evident later in the gigantic scale and panel sections of his paintings. As he said: "It reminds me of the architect I never became."

During the Second World War, he flew more than 40 B-26 bombing missions in North Africa and Europe, even acting as personal aerial chauffeur to Marlene Dietrich. (As he was a legendary raconteur, some of Bluhm's doubting friends brought him to a reception for the singer to prove this claim. As he entered, Dietrich rose to her feet and cried, "Oh Norman, so good to see you.")

After distinguished war service Bluhm went back to Miles van der Robe briefly in Chicago and then, supported by the GI Bill, to Florence to study fresco painting, a major influence. In 1947 he moved to Paris for nine years. Bluhm studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and knew everyone from Alberto Giacometti to Antonin Artaud, Paul Eluard to René Char. He also appeared in Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée*, as a handsome black-gowned intellectual sitting in a café reading *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Bluhm came to New York in 1956 (the year Jackson Pollock died) and was a central figure in what became known, not happily, as second-generation Abstract Expressionism. He was a core member of the hard-drinking, hard-fighting crowd around the notorious Cedar Tavern, a now mythic high point of Manhattan bohemianism.



America's best-known little-known major artist: Bluhm in his studio in Vermont

Don Rees

With the poet and curator Frank O'Hara, Bluhm produced a series of 26 "poem-paintings". O'Hara's poem "Three Aids", dedicated to Bluhm, perfectly captures the artist's work in its first stanza:

So many things in the air! soot, elephant balls, a Chinese cloud which is entirely collapsed, a cat swung by its tail and the senses of the dead which are hanging about inside my tired red eyes.

A year after arriving in New York, Bluhm had his first solo show with the new Leo Castelli gallery, where he appeared with such contemporaries as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Bluhm popped in unannounced on his 1960 solo show at Castelli's to discover paintings by Rauschenberg and Johns actually propped against his own works, entirely obscuring them. Castelli wailed: "But Norman, what can I say, they're selling!" Bluhm doubtless

proffered physical violence and he nicknamed Castelli "Mighty Mouse". The eclipse of "Ab Ex" by "Pop" was almost as total and overnight as journalism makes it sound and Bluhm suffered along with a whole generation of painters. His combative stance probably did not help: "By accepting the rules of the dealer the artist destroys himself, better than anyone else could. New York now means this destructive merchandising of art."

Bluhm returned to Paris in 1964 for a year before moving to East Hampton and, finally, remote Vermont. When he came to Manhattan it was to visit the Metropolitan and the Cloisters, whose 15th-century "Unicorn" tapestries were as major an influence as the works of Tiepolo, Rubens, Matisse or ecclesiastical stained glass.

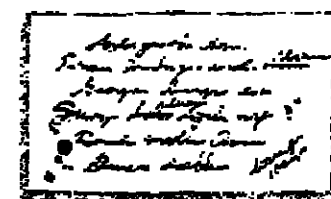
If Bluhm was far from modish he had become America's best-known little-known major artist and his supposed neglect should not be exaggerated. He

was in the collection of every major museum and honoured with various touring retrospectives. Indeed a 40-year retrospective is to open in March at the Butler Institute of American Art in Ohio along with the publication of the first full-length monograph, by Galleria Peccolo in Livorno.

Bluhm's style continued to evolve regardless of fashion, following its own internal obligations, and the paintings seemed to get larger every year, as if in deliberate defiance of the art world's relative lack of interest. For Bluhm the only thing that mattered was the work and its own organic resolution; everything else was publicity and marketing. By these standards, he was one of the most successful artists of the century.

ADRIAN DANNATT

Norman Bluhm, painter: born Chicago, Illinois 28 March 1921; twice married (one son, one daughter); died East Wallingford, Vermont 3 February 1999.



LITERARY NOTES

H. R. F. KEATING

Let's read less of the American novel

WHAT HAS happened to the British novel? From the highest level down to the run-of-the-mill it is being squeezed almost to death by a swarm of invaders from the other side of the Atlantic. And those invaders come - never forget it - from another and a different country speaking a different language, American English. So what they have to tell us cannot be as useful to us, as nourishing to the imagination, as the novels written by those who share our common assumptions.

Not everyone here sees this. The young, ears ringing with the lyrics of American music, minds filled with pictures from Hollywood movies and Channel 4 television imports, seem to feel they live in a land hovering somewhere above the heaving waters of the Atlantic. But go to the land that actually lies beyond the Atlantic and you see how very different life is there. And we have allowed over the years this different America to spread too insistently into what I have to call our cultural life.

We cannot help having lost cinema to Hollywood. But the shelves in our bookshops are too crammed with books from America. The columns of our newspapers are too filled with reviews of American novels.

So, should it be said that all American novels should be somehow banned? No. All I am asking is that only those

novels written there that are of truly world stature should be made much of here. There are enough of them indeed - Bellow, Updike, Wolfe - cream of the rich society able generously to support an extraordinarily large number of fiction writers of all sorts. At a mystery-writing convention I attended in Monterey a year or so ago, for example, there were no fewer than 400 published writers present.

This is not, however, completely the fault of the bookpages' editors up and down the land for paying so much attention to so many books that are essentially foreign to us. Perhaps, in fact, we should apportion blame to the young academic lions of yesteryear who, emerging with their brightly shining PhDs, saw America as an exciting, largely untouched playground. Within a few years departments of American Studies sprang up, giving in consequence undue prominence to anything of a literary nature that had the magic of America sparkling off it. And haven't there been Popular Culture studies, too? Whose popular culture? That emanating from America.

And what are we paying attention to these days? To novels from America that are by no means bad, even if they are often strictly parochial chronicles of the behaviour of people in that other country. It does us

no great harm to follow the reviewers and read them. Except that they do not do for us what a novel should do. They cannot. The references are wrong. Their writers have been brought up from their very earliest days on nursery lore, children's stories, comic-book tales that are different from those British children experience. Let alone all the assumptions and influences writers over there have sucked in during their adult lives.

Only very, very few people in Britain will gain from such books their full value, especially since what a work of fiction has to "say" comes not directly but insidiously from the tiny details, the barely expressed thoughts. However, from books written by those who share their in-built assumptions and references, and written not in that different language, they will be able to absorb everything, or almost everything, put before them.

So let us give more attention to our own books backyard. Not all the plants in it are necessarily as well-written, as gripping, as illuminating as their American counterparts. But most of them are, and they will do their work more effectively. They were made to do so. They cannot help having been so made.

H.R.F. Keating is the author of *'Bribery, Corruption Also'* (Macmillan, £16.99).

GAZETTE

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS

FOGARTY, Pat, on Wednesday 17 February 1999, died peacefully at home aged 88. Beloved partner to Joyce and sister to Leigh and Denis. Cremation service on Tuesday 22 February 11am at Golden Green West Chapel. Friends welcome afterwards at 44 Marquis Road, NW1. No flowers; donations if desired to Royal Free AIDS Appeal. Cheques to Special Trustees of the Royal Free Hospital c/o Tom Pennington, 140 Chesham Road, London NW3 9QG.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Princess Royal, Patron, Scottish Rugby Union, today attends the England v Scotland match in the Five Nations Championship at Twickenham, Middlesex.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

TODAY: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am; Nijmegen Company Grenadier Guards mounts the Queen's Guard, at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am, band provided by the Scots Guards. TOMORROW: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 10am.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In memoriam) are charged at £2.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra.

BIRTHDAYS

TODAY: Mr Robert Altman, film director; 74; Mr Roy Beggs MP; 63; Mr Gordon Brown MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer; 48; Mr John Browne, group chief executive, BP; 51; Professor Andrew Fabian, astronomer; 51; Dr Ruth Gipps, composer and conductor; 78; Mr Jimmy Greaves, television commentator and footballer; 59; Mr Eddie Hemmings, cricketer; 50; Mr Ian Irwin, chairman, Scottish Transport Group; 66; Commandant Dame Marion Kettlewell, former Director, WRNS; 85; Mr Mike Leigh, playwright and theatre director; 56; Professor Donald Longmore, cardiac surgeon; 71; Ms Siobhain McDonagh MP; 39; Lord McNally, head of Public Affairs, Shandwick Consultants; 58; Mr Norman Miscampbell QC, a Recorder of the Crown Court and former MP; 74; Mr John Murphy, chairman, Interbrand Group plc; 55; Mr Phil Neal, former England footballer; 48; Mr David O'Dowd, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary; 57; Sir Frederick Page, former chief executive, British Aerospace; 82; Dr Valerie Payne, former Headmistress, Malvern Girls' College; 59; Mr Sidney Poitier, actor; 72; Vice-Admiral Sir Cameron Rusby, former chief executive, Scottish SPCA; 73; Mr George Waring, actor and director; 72; Mr Barry Wordsworth, conductor; 51.

TOMORROW: King Harald V of Norway; 62; Sir John Bourn, Comptroller and Auditor General; 65; Professor Ruth Bowden, anatomist; 84; Miss Jilly Cooper, writer and journalist; 62; M Hubert de Givenchy, fashion designer; 72; Mr Michael Deakin, documentary film maker; 60; Mr Leslie Durbin, silversmith; 86; Baroness Fookes, former MP; 63; Sir John Gouden, UK Permanent Representa-

ANNIVERSARIES

tive, North Atlantic Council; 58; Mr Carron Greig, company chairman; 74; Sir Michael Gyllis, former MP; 65; Sir Conrad Heron, former senior civil servant; 83; Sir Reginald Hibbert, former ambassador to France; 77; Sir John McGregor Hill, former chairman, British Nuclear Fuels; 78; Lord Hunter, a former Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland; 86; Mr Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe; 75; Professor Sir Rupert Myers, scientist; 78; Mrs Diana Organ MP; 47; General Sir Robert Pascoe, former Adjutant-General; 67; Sir Ashley Ponsonby, former Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire; 78; Professor John Prescott, Principal, Wye College, London University; 62; Lt-Gen Sir John Richards, former marshal of the Diplomatic Corps; 72; Mr Alan Rickman, actor; 53; Miss Nina Simone, singer; 65; Mr Richard Turner-Warwick, surgeon and urologist; 74; Professor Leslie Wagner, Vice-Chancellor, Leeds Metropolitan University; 58; Mr David Wood, actor and playwright; 55.

TODAY: Births: Honoré Daumier, caricaturist and painter; 1808; Dame Marie Rambert, founder of the Ballet Rambert; 1888; Carl Mayer, film director; 1892. Deaths: James I, King of Scotland, assassinated 1437; Luca della Robbia, sculptor; 1482; Nathan Field, actor and playwright; buried 1633; Augustin-Eugène Scribe, playwright; 1861; Percy Aldridge Grainger, composer; 1961; Robert Oxton Bolt, playwright and screenwriter; 1995. On this day: Austria declared herself bankrupt, 1811; a great storm raged in England, with much damage to the Crystal Palace, while the steeple of Chichester

Cathedral was blown away, 1861; Anthony Eden resigned as British Foreign Secretary, 1958; John Glenn, astronaut, was launched into space in the Mercury capsule *Friendship 7*, 1962; new design £10 notes were issued, showing a portrait of Florence Nightingale, 1975. Today is the Feast Day of St Eleutherius of Tournai, St Eucherius of Orleans, St Sadoth, Saints Tyrannus, Zenobius and their Companions and St Wulfric.

TOMORROW: Births: Peter III, Tsar of Russia; 1723; Carl Czerny, pianist, teacher and writer; 1791; John Henry Newman, Cardinal; 1801; Charles-Marie Jean-Albert Widor, organist and composer; 1845; Sacha Guitry, actor, playwright and director; 1885; Anais Nin, writer; 1903; Wylan Hugh Auden, poet; 1907; Douglas Bader; Second World War fighter pilot; 1910; Tad Dameron (Tadley Ewing Peake), jazz pianist, composer and arranger; 1917. Deaths: Pope Julius II; 1513; Jethro Tull, agricultural writer; 1741; Kurt Eisner, Bavarian premier, assassinated in Munich 1919; George Ellery Hale, astronomer; 1938; Malcolm X (Little), black leader; murdered 1965. On this day: freedom of worship was established in France, 1795; the first republic of Cuba was founded, 1901; the British protectorate over Egypt ended, 1922; the *New Statesman* was founded, 1931; it was announced that British women aged 60 and over would receive the Old Age Pension, 1940; identity cards were abolished in Britain, 1953; in the United States, John Ehrlichman, H.R. Haldeman and John Mitchell were sentenced after the Watergate affair; 1975. Tomorrow is the Feast Day of St George of Amas-tris, St Germanus of Granfel, St Peter Damian, St Robert Southwell and St Severian of Scythopolis.

LECTURES

TODAY: National Gallery: Rebecca Drew, "Love (III): Cranach, *Cupid Complaining to Venus*", 12pm. Victoria and Albert Museum: Susan Bright, "The Body in Photography", 2pm. Tate Gallery: Laurence Bradbury, "Sickert, Painting and Cookery", 1pm. British Museum: Paul Collins, "From Village to City in the Ancient Near East", 11.30am; Paul Collins, "Records and Writing in the Ancient Near East", 1.30pm. National Portrait Gallery: Malcolm Warner, "John Everett Millais Series. From Private to Public: Millais' career as a portraitist", 3pm (0171-312 3463 for tickets).

TOMORROW: Victoria and Albert Museum: Alistair Robinson, "Nine Contemporary Photographers", 2pm. Tate Gallery: Laurence Bradbury, "Degas, Sculpture and Dance", 2.30pm. National Portrait Gallery: Paul Webb, "The Film Career of Ian Carmichael", 3pm.

DINNERS

Defence and Security Forum: Lady Olga Maitland, President, Defence and Security Forum, presided at a dinner held yesterday evening in the House of Lords, London SW1. Field Marshal Lord Inge, former Chief of Defence Staff, was the guest speaker. Col Philip Howes, Chairman, also spoke.

RAF Strike Command: A Ladies Guest Night was held by RAF Strike Command yesterday in the Officers' Mess, Headquarters Strike Command, RAF High Wycombe, on the occasion of the retirement of Sqn Ldr J. Barber, Sqn Ldr M. O'Reilly, Sqn Ldr D. Lyons, Flt Lt W. Bissett and Flt Lt S. Pittaway.

Three key principles on gene modification

THE GIVENNESS of creation is one of the deepest realities we face. All around us is a complexity and glory which is not of our making. Cloud formations, oak trees, insects and our own digestive systems are all provided for us, and scientific understanding in these areas has to involve respect for what is there. Genetic manipulation is born of the unravelling of codes, of elaborate languages that communicate in ways we yet dimly understand. Those scientists who are believers rightly respond with awe for the Creator and the complexity of creation. God creates in ways which are beyond the cleverest. We normally just manage to describe adequately and use successfully what we are given.

But awe for the Creator is not the only response. Something less modest is often in evidence. Take one of the issues thrown up by gene technology in the current controversy, ownership. If sun, wind, rain, earth, minerals, organisms and cell structures are all given to us, we can use the word "owned" only loosely. The natural things around us are owned by the God who has made them and us. We receive things, steward them and pass them on. Land is shared out and used, but we do not possess it. Bottled water is sold, but the price is for the bottling. We are surrounded by a vast priceless creation, and what we pay for simply reflects our labours, technology and trading patterns. It is added value.

However, agribusinesses involved in genetic modification see it another way. They claim rights of ownership. Yet the gene technologists do not actually invent the genes. They get them from existing brands. In creation terms the technology can be quite crude: using enzymes and plasmids to transfer genes from one organism to another, and even gunpowder to blast particles into the target cell. The genes in all their breathtaking, coded, life-shaping power are as supplied by the Great Technologist. The junior mechanics just fiddle around a bit.

Indeed, the analogy is apt. If a manufacturer supplies a mag-

nificent car, and a mechanic does some slight modifications, no one would expect the mechanic to turn round and say, "The car is mine now, and I have the right to sell it for the full price." Yet that is precisely the move that the GMO agribusinesses have made, and have established in international law.

They have moved around a few genes and are claiming ownership of the genotype; adjusted the carburettor and taken over the car. And, where as it is reasonable to pay a good mechanic, it is unreasonable to have to buy something we've already been given.

FAITH & REASON

ELAINE STORKEY

The boundaries between creation and manipulation may be blurred but it is still possible to set sound guidelines on genetic experimentation

But there is another issue. The knowledge built into the Creation is vast and we know only a little. In Einstein's phrase, we are dipping our toes in an ocean of knowledge. A philosophy of science and technology based on Christian foundations builds in humility, because we need awareness of what we do not know. But it is easy for some at the boundaries of technology to focus only on what they do know, to have a doctrine of effective omniscience. Belief in omniscience makes it become possible to take on any modifications, and assert: "These changes are safe" - even, it seems, to the extent of suppressing evidence to the contrary. And yet every human and technological activity is surrounded by unintended and unforeseen

consequences. In this area the range of unintended consequences could be vast - digestive and human body effects, antibiotics, bacterial modification, effects on plant, animal, insect, bird populations, body and health implications and so on. We are talking large crops. It is possible to have tunnel vision and not see what is outside our tunnel. Some of what we are doing will be beyond our vision and our ken.

The GMOs may be good and they may not be, but if we respect the already excellent creation, we approach possible changes with some constraint. *Titanics* sink. Technologies fail. We are still discovering why we need a range of natural foods which artificial foods cannot replace. What we do not know has been built into the procedures of good quality science. There are research routines, trials, tests, patterns of review and structures which prevent self-interest leading to biased results.

It seems that if this issue is to be tackled properly we need three principles in place. The first requires respect for the integrity of creation and of the boundaries that have been established. Technological manipulation can never be a free-for-all. Transference of genes must rest on a sound ethical basis. The second principle is that there should be open access to what the Creator has given us. The manipulation of genotypes is something like horticulture or patenting a technology and does not amount to ownership in perpetuity. The third principle is that we need to recognise the limits of what we know. When new steps like this are taken the company must be patient with research, and be prepared to be held responsible for all unforeseen consequences.

What has become evident is that these principles have not been followed. Marketing has nudged ahead of scientific ethics, appropriated ownership, caused deep concern in the Third World, and knowledge is asserted rather than proven. A pause now would be better than recrimination later. It would also leave us still free to enjoy what the Creator has given.

The agony and the XTC

Stubborn, single-minded, eccentric – that's XTC. But a comeback album of orchestrations? That's so Andy Partridge. By John Morrish

Taking slurps from a disgusting brown drink that's supposed to restore him after a bout of flu, Andy Partridge of XTC is in an unusually quiet mood. But even when he's recounting the band's woes, he can't resist a joke. "It's a catalogue of errors," he agrees, then elaborates. "It's an Argos catalogue of errors."

It certainly appeared an error when, in 1982, after years touring the world, he developed permanent stage-fright and took XTC off the road. With an album and single ("Senses Working Overtime") high in the British charts, they had seemed on the brink of a breakthrough.

Nor was it necessarily sensible to spend five years suing their manager after an unpaid VAT bill for £300,000 dropped through Partridge's letterbox. They lost some £500,000 on the exercise.

Nor was it transparently worthwhile to spend another five years "on strike" in an attempt to escape from their "back of a fag packet" contract with Virgin records.

And, even now, there are those who wonder whether the right way to come back after seven years of silence is with a record dominated by orchestrations: this from a band who made their name with an album called *Drums And Wires*. But Partridge is not in the mood for doubts: "I was more excited putting the stuff together for this record, in more nervous anticipation, than I was for our very first album."

XTC "downed plectrums" in 1992 after Virgin records suddenly withdrew their last single. Since then, they've effectively been paralysed. "If we'd done anything as XTC, Virgin would have owned it. If we'd farted in the bath, they would have owned that," he says.

They took odd jobs, musical and otherwise, surviving on what Partridge calls "a low average wage" from publishing. Andy,



hailed briefly as The Godfather of Britpop, worked with Cathy Dennis, Terry Hall, Blur and others. Colin Moulding, bass player and songwriter, did some sessions and made stained glass. Guitarist Dave Gregory, with only a nominal share of the publishing, had to work moving rental cars around the country, and not for the first time.

But Partridge continued to write. He also built a studio in his garden shed, where he created increasingly finished demos, despite uproar in his personal life. In America in the early Eighties, he had met a woman called Erica Wexler. Their association threatened his marriage: on the *Sixtyfour* album, the band's biggest success in America, a track called "Another Satellite" was intended to warn her away. Luckily for him, she was not easily dissuaded. "I fell jam-side up," he says, gesturing upstairs where Erica can be heard clumping about.

In the meantime, his wife Marianne had left him for another man. Partridge captured his anger in a song called "Your Dictionary", intended, he says, "as an exercise

to get the pus out of the top of my head". It appears on the new album, which is hardly diplomatic.

Partridge, no househusband, now found himself looking after his two young children for half the year. He began drinking heavily, until prostate trouble told him to stop. "It reduces you to a real old man status," he says. Then there was an inner-ear infection that might have deafened him.

But in the midst of his troubles he surprised himself by finding "a new sound". "River of Orchids", the opening track of the new album, began as a two-bar riff built up from pizzicato string samples, layered with chants and melodic fragments. "I think it sounds like a nursery rhyme," says Partridge, "which pleases me no end."

In 1997, free of Virgin, the band began preparing a new album. Colin Moulding had, as usual, a handful of songs in primitive shape. Andy had 40, finished. He insisted that the new record be a double album of 21 songs, half "orchestral", and half electric. In the event, it will appear as two separate records: *Apple Venus Volume 1* and *Volume 2*.

Partridge once wrote his songs by stamping his foot and strumming into a mono cassette. Now he makes digital demos in his shed, then replicates them in his producer's computer. For the orchestral *Apple Venus*, the budget allowed a day of recording at Abbey Road, where a 40-piece band played arrangements written by Mike "Wombles" Batt. But the human string players could not match the mathematical precision of "River of Orchids", as programmed by Partridge and producer Haydn Bendall. Nor could the woodwinds cope with the computerised ostinato in "Greenman", another fine example of Partridge's armchair paganism. The orchestra became a glorified sample, cut and pasted together to achieve the "Vaughan Williams with a hard-on" sound required.



XTC, then (left) and now. Partridge admits: 'I'm more excited about this than I was about our first album'

Before all that, however, the new methods had taken their toll elsewhere. After waiting years to make the record, then months to slot his guitar parts into the spaces allocated to him, Dave Gregory decided he'd had enough. He had been in the band for 19 years.

According to Partridge: "I said to him, 'Look Dave, I need to do these vocals in peace, and I can't concentrate with you sitting there shaking your head and going on about how it's all fucked. So would you take a break while I do my vocals?' And he took that as permission for him to go."

Gregory and Partridge have not spoken since, although there have been bitter faxes. Gregory presents his departure as a matter of craft skills displaced by new technology, and he tries to be conciliatory. "It's not the record I wanted to make after six years of doing nothing, but it's a fine album," he says. "I think Andy's done a good job in recording the songs. Plus, there was a lot of personal stuff between Andy and me that got a bit out of hand."

Recently, he has played a few sessions and recorded a new version of "No Milk Today" for Peter Noone of Herman's Hermits. Friends have received copies of his *Remoulds*, in which Gregory creates brilliant Tom Keating-style forgeries of tracks ranging from "MacArthur Park" to "All Along The Watchtower".

What undermined Gregory within XTC was that he was not a writer. Recently, though, he has been mulling over the unfinished songs he has accumulated over the years, with the aim of assembling an album of his own. And what will it be like? "A real kit of drums, a guitar going through an amplifier: that's the essence of rock music – and where I come from. But there's nothing wrong with hi-tech, pseudo-classical stuff," he says, and seems entirely sincere. "I'm a big fan of Prog Rock."

Partridge is currently thinking about *Volume 2*, to be recorded in Colin Moulding's garage outside Swindon. All very XTC. Partridge admits he lives in a limbo between rock'n'roll and real life. Sociable

and effortlessly entertaining, he admits to having no friends. "It's an only child thing," he says, quite cheerfully.

XTC, he says, is no longer a band. "It's more of a brand. It's more HP Sauce than ever. We're two selfish middle-aged gits who make the music we make. I often see people our age in bands and I think 'You're pretending now! You're pretending to be rebellious, you're putting on this fake stance. I bet you wish you were at home with your slippers on, looking through your stamp collection'."

Partridge's single-mindedness and his vision have cost XTC a lot over the years. At the same time, they have probably kept XTC going. He surely must have been tempted, many times, to jack it all in, but he says not. "It's not that I think I'm going to save the planet with my songs," he insists. "I'm realistic about that now. But I can't stop writing."

Apple Venus Volume 1 is released on Cooking Vinyl on Monday (Cook CD 172)



IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE:

Seve speaks from the heart and talks of his hopes for the future, his fears about his health
Plus: The question that made him cry

How low can you go? - Maximise your potential with our 15-Page Instruction Guide

Mark O'Meara - The round of my life (and it's not the one you think)

Nicklaus - Great golfer, chronic captain

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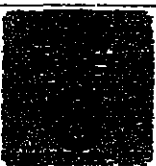
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THE INDEPENDENT

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

BY FIONA STURGES

<div>  <div>EXCELLENT</div> </div> <div>  <div>GOOD</div> </div> <div>  <div>OK</div> </div> <div>  <div>POOR</div> </div> <div>  <div>DEADLY</div> </div>					
OVERVIEW		CRITICAL VIEW		OUR VIEW	ON VIEW
THE FILM AFFLICTION  <p>Paul Schrader's bleak study of fatherhood and fatalism, based on Russell Banks's novel, stars Nick Nolte as a man struggling to escape his violent father's influence.</p>		<p>"Nick Nolte gives a performance of such rage and sorrow the screen seems hardly big enough to contain him," observed Anthony Quinn: "The heaviness is a little stifling, but not inappropriate; Schrader's American tragedy has a dull finality that is determinedly depressing," opined <i>Time Out</i>, while <i>The Guardian</i> declared: "Nolte has rarely been better." "Schrader's austere direction and Nolte's raw portrayal of a man cracking up keeps <i>Affliction</i> firmly on track," decided the <i>Financial Times</i>. "Schrader's lapses of judgement come close to making the whole thing a travesty," spluttered <i>The Express</i>. "Infuriatingly slow and sloppy," yawned the <i>Daily Mail</i>.</p>		<p>Those who were moved by <i>The Sweet Hereafter</i> - also based on a Banks novel - will be spellbound by <i>Affliction</i>. Nolte turns himself inside out in a performance that has been hotly tipped for an Oscar.</p> 	<p><i>Affliction</i> is on general release, certificate 15. 113 minutes</p>
THE PLAY LE CID  <p>Declan Donnellan directs Corneille's 1637 tragedy-comedy in this modern-dress staging. It follows the story of a young man who slays his lover's father.</p>		<p>"Donnellan is a master at creating a shifting diagram of the psychological forces operating at any one point... A lucid and passionate staging," wrote Paul Taylor. "Donnellan's achievement is to make old Spanish values seem passionately significant rather than antique absurdities," noted the <i>Evening Standard</i>. "Superbly fluid and intelligent," said the <i>Financial Times</i>, adding "Donnellan's production rarely stops moving, swirling from scene to scene like an elaborate dance." "Spare staging, narrative clarity, incisive acting," reported <i>The Times</i>. "Le Cid is a triumph," pronounced <i>The Daily Telegraph</i>, and <i>Time Out</i> deemed it "remarkable".</p>		<p>The constant shift of passion and power is magnificently represented under Donnellan's direction, while the potentially risible Spanish code of honour is brought up to date. A resounding success.</p> 	<p><i>Le Cid</i> is at the Riverside Studios, London W6 until 26 February. For bookings and enquiries call 0181-237 1111</p>
THE ALBUM JIMI TENOR  <p>Finnish synth-master Jimi Tenor returns with a second UK release, <i>Organism</i>, which includes the forthcoming single "Year of the Apocalypse."</p>		<p>"Quirky and quibotic, it's bags of fun, and aptly titled too. Tenor blending his beats and samples to produce a warm, organic sound that's light years away from the more glacial tones of techno purists," decided Andy Gill. "Morocro-esque Moog eruptions, Money Mark funkadelia and spooky Dalek vocoders - sleazy listening indeed," remarked <i>Uncut</i>. <i>Time Out</i> was ecstatic: "One fabulous, spangled journey from start to finish," while <i>The Face</i> found it "A stylish revelation". "Surprisingly down-tempo, invariably cheesy and strangely soulful," reported the <i>NME</i>. "More than enough to command attention," mumbled <i>The Times</i>.</p>		<p>Tenor brings together cheesy synths, complex jazz and swing arrangements and his kooky subject matter in this impeccable album. The end of the world has never sounded so much fun.</p> 	<p>Organism is available from record shops on Warp. Jimi Tenor will be performing at the Improv Theatre, W1 on 25 February. For enquiries call 0171-387 2414.</p>
THE OPERA PARSIFAL  <p>Nikolaus Lehnhoff's production of Wagner's <i>Parsifal</i> at the ENO sees the action stripped of religious imagery and set in a post-nuclear wasteland.</p>		<p>"This provocative, intelligent and very moving production of Wagner's perplexing masterpiece dares to ask questions for which there are no easy answers," decided Edward Seckerson, adding, "It is the agnostic <i>Parsifal</i>. It wants to believe, but it needs to know." "Moving and profound," wrote <i>The Spectator</i>. "Thoughtful and satisfying," opined <i>The Times</i>. "The casting is from the ENO's top drawer... but the production is desperately short of theatrical bite," noted the <i>Financial Times</i>, while <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> confessed: "I can't help thinking that Wagner would have been exasperated by the ugly and nihilistic interpretation foisted on it."</p>		<p>Wagner purists may be distracted by the stripped-down nature of Lehnhoff's interpretation; but the splendour of the ENO orchestra and the fine cast cannot fail to impress.</p> 	<p><i>Parsifal</i> will be at the Coliseum until 19 March. For bookings and enquiries call 0171-632 8300</p>
THE TV PROGRAMME  <p>Jarlath Cooper revisits ideas he explored in his college thesis - which got one of the lowest marks in the year - the state of "outsider art" around the world.</p>		<p>"The unwillingness of the programme to risk an explanation was a flaw, but perhaps it was a necessary price for the enthusiasm Cooper brought to the subject. The film was an eloquent argument in favour of art which may not be pretty, but is chock full of life," revealed Robert Hanks. "If a dead sheep can do it, so can a lorry-load of smashed Villoroy and Boch," quipped the <i>Daily Mail</i>, calling the series "fascinating". "Cocker was out to prove a point, or rather to get a better grade for his theories about Outsider Art," revealed the <i>Evening Standard</i>, while the <i>Daily Telegraph</i> decided "The choice of pop star was the key." "An unusual take on life and art," said the <i>Daily Record</i>.</p>		<p>Despite his low college grade, Cocker showed a genuine interest in Outsider Art and uncovered some interesting work, though he failed to offer adequate critical appraisal.</p> 	<p><i>Journeys into the Outside With Jarvis Cocker</i> continues next Tuesday at 11.10pm, C4</p>

EXIT POLL

TOSCA
ROYAL ALBERT HALL
LONDON

NELS WEISE
33, theatre agent,
London
"I thought it was really good. Susan Bullock was fantastic and the staging really worked. I have seen Tosca lots of times, but the stand-out quality for me was the sound. This time it sounded really spectacular and all the voices were great."

JEAN QUADLING
64, housewife,
Gravesend
"It was very good. I thoroughly enjoyed it, especially the idea of it being in the round. And having the actors constantly walking through the audience and on to the stage. It was slightly scary, looking around and seeing dark figures come down the stairs. The only downside was that I thought the orchestra drowned out the singers in the star, but as it progressed this balanced itself out."

JULIE SKINNER
26, medical sales
rep, London
"I thought it was really good and very emotional. It's the second time I have been to the opera, but it was different because it was a much bigger place to fill. And because this was in the round, there was a different atmosphere. I thought it was fantastic and Susan Bullock was excellent. Her voice is beautiful, really really nice. I thought she made it."

WILLIAM CHESHIRE
55, every company
clerk, London
"What I particularly liked was the very dramatic setting, and a good use of the open space. The floor clock was beautifully styled, and made you think of a church. And the props in general were simple, but highly effective and atmospheric. Which is really how it is supposed to be set."

Intimacy on a grand scale

IN LAST year's production of Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*, the director David Freeman showed that the scale of the Albert Hall need not get in the way of dramatic intimacy. As he said at the time, boxers don't box big at the Albert Hall; similarly, the key for singers is not to act big and operatic, but to draw the audience into the clinches.

The same composer's *Tosca* poses different problems, not least because the eponymous heroine does, indeed, act big and operatic. Not for her *Butterfly*'s sweet stoicism. She is someone who makes an aria out of a crisis, and the relationship that matters in the opera is not between Tosca and her lover Cavaradossi, but between Tosca and the lecherous chief of police, Scarpia. Since she kills him at the end

of Act 2, Act 3 often misses the target, even if the bullets that kill Cavaradossi don't, and Tosca's climactic suicide act too easily seems the desperate act of a foolish woman.

It is to the credit of Freeman's staging that the tension is sustained through that final act, so that Tosca's suicide has something of the force of meaningful sacrifice. There is a genuine verismo whiff to the production, right down to the reek of incense that fills the nostrils as you enter the auditorium. The details, though, do not

crowd out the drama, and David Roger's spare but evocative sets use every inch of the arena, while leaving room for Freeman's attentive mise-en-scene. Cavaradossi's easel has the look of a gallows, warning us that he, like Tosca, will die for his art.

Sung in Amanda Holden's succinct translation, the opera benefits from amplification that may blur some musical contours in unnatural perspectives, but allows the drama to breathe. The sound is not kind to all the voices, and lends the BBC Concert Orchestra under Peter Robinson a "Friday Night is Music Night" blarney, not wholly inappropriate to Puccini.

Susan Bullock's Tosca dominates proceedings, the tone fevered and sincere if sometimes spread too thin.

John Uhlenhopp's Cavaradossi fares less well, the microphone emphasising a sense of strain, but this is, after all, a man at the end of his tether. Keith Latham's Scarpia is all brute bluster; more subtly might not go amiss.

With clearly etched cameos from the supporting cast, this is a real ensemble performance. Opera on this scale will never supplant opera house performances, but in the right hands, it offers a different and viable set of possibilities, not the least of which is being able to follow the drama moment by moment. And in a composer such as Puccini, that pays rich dividends.

NICK KIMBERLEY

A version of this review appeared in later editions of yesterday's paper



'Tosca': the details don't crowd out the drama

Andrew Burnman

Plato - the transsexual musical

"DO YOU know who I am?" shouted the muscular, cowboy-hatted African-American drag performer, on stage at the Bowers Ballroom. The crowd at the Manhattan night-club - three floors of suspiciously straight-looking white people - screamed out wrong guesses at her name.

But this hord was well acquainted with another drag queen. A fictional one named Hedwig. They were at the ballroom to celebrate the year-old musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and its spanning new cast album.

In the play, Hedwig recounts the story of her life: an East German "ship of a girl-boy" undergoes a botched Iron Curtain sex change (thus the "angry inch" of the title) and becomes an American trailer-park divorcee working "the jobs we can blow". Decked out in a Farrah Fawcett wig and a stonewashed denim frock with a fringe, she recalls her romance with an adolescent rock-god-to-be, and


finally becomes herself, a demi-gendered singer.

While Hedwig the dingy chanteuse is a bit of loser, *Hedwig* the play is anything but. The New York theatre critics' pet will soon be a movie. And you may be seeing Hedwig at a London theatre near you.

The play has deserved accolades for its music, which ranges from Iggy Pop to indie-pop, and also for its unimpeachable picture of a drag diva - more Courtney Love than Judy Garland. Hedwig is given to clever, angry patter. When asked what creature had to die, for her to have her raty fur coat, Hedwig quips: "My Aunt Trudy". But does the much-beloved Hedwig indicate a new affection for New York's transgendered people?

"Films such as *Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert* and *To Wong Foo* have made drag non-threatening and have created expectations and audiences for something even 'edgier', like

NEW YORK
DIARY



ALISSA QUART

Hedwig, says Eric Clarke, a Rockefeller Fellow at the Lesbian and Gay Studies Center at the City University of New York.

"Of course, people generally just want to see drag and transsexuals as entertainment, not on the street or in the supermarket," he adds.

Unlike Patrick Swayze in a dress, Hedwig isn't just a mound of sparkle. She conveys suffering and world-weariness, mourning her never-was career and her lost loves. Her songs are sophisticated: Hedwig's best number is dedicated to Plato's androgyny. One theatre critic (a fan) compared it with *Rocky Horror*, but the show in fact aspires to be a trash-rock version of Plato's *Symposium*.

At the Bowers Ballroom, Cheater (also the play's on-stage band, The Angry Inch) played to a drag-loving bet crowd, among which straight men built like spark plugs wondered out loud when the evening's Hedwig lookalike competition would get underway. With the bewigged drag queens in such short supply, one man started fetishising a "real" woman bartender with Hedwig-themed hair - two gargantuan pony tails complemented by a dog-collar and a schoolgirl pout.

"Her hair is fabulous!" one man cried. "She's fierce," said another. "No, she's fabulous," chimed a third.

Clarke compares *Hedwig* to another diversion in what he calls an "East Village touristic" vein - the weekly "Foxy Night" at a Manhattan bar named Cock.

"All of a sudden, straight people and conventional gay men are lining up, paying \$5 and watching members of the audience do the most disgusting, unrepeatable things with their bodies for a \$100 prize," says Clarke. One of those "unrepeatable" acts was akin to what the Eighties performance artist Karen Finley did with yams.

Hedwig is also something of a work of West Village tourism. After *Hedwig* the play, theatre-goers pour out on to the West Side Highway and walk towards the subway. And as they do, they ignore the Meat Packing district's many real transsexuals.


ASA well-chosen primer for Lauryn Hill Live (Radio 1, Sunday). Trevor Nelson played "Vocab", a fugues track lifted from a 1994 BBC session. The tune's insistent nodding rhythms prepared the ground for an outstanding live performance by the young singer and MC, who has now gone solo. Lauryn Hill describes her music as honest and spiritual, and before taking to the stage she spoke with poetic reverence about some of the artists who inspired her: Whitney Houston, she said, possesses an "anointed voice", while Aretha Franklin was her teacher and didn't even know it. Miss Hill has her own accomplished way with words, but she pointed to Curtis Mayfield as the guy whose lyrics were "prettier than all the world".

Another master of the vocab was Matthew Arnold (1822-88), and his poem "Dover Beach" opened a new

series entitled Clouded Hills (World Service, Monday). In this first programme, Richard Holmes planned to read aloud on the very beach that inspired the great work, but, as he himself pointed out, the problem these days is to find it. Searching for something poetic in modern-day Dover turned out to be quite a challenge as he battled between columns of freight trucks bound for the Continent. Eventually, however, he made it on to the shingle. Then, his voice almost lost in a bitter wind, he began reading. Somehow it seemed worth the struggle.

When a father observes his son asking for the undertaker's address at a funeral, you may expect him to find it mildly disturbing. Especially when the boy's own grandmother just been buried. Yet in Kit Wright's short story *This Thing of Darkness* (Radio 4, Saturday), the

THE WEEK
IN RADIO



MAGNUS MILLS

offspring's growing interest in be-reavement is positively encouraged. While Dad scans the papers for forthcoming sad events, his son takes a Saturday job at the local funeral parlour, whose proprietor declares gravely that "the industry must adjust itself to the times or die".

The tale, read by the author, had a perfect ending that cannot be revealed here in case of repeats.

The next story is, apparently, true. The two companies that built the Transcontinental Railroad across the United States in the last century were making so much money that when they met in the middle, they both refused to stop. Instead, they kept going for another 100 miles each, leaving a big overlap of unwanted track.

This was one of the facts unearthed in *Behind the Iron Horse* (Radio 4, Saturday). The railroad allowed Americans to travel west and "finish the landscape", as one contemporary put it. Cavalry posts were established to protect the construction workers from Indian attacks, and special railroad towns were built to cater for the workmen's basic needs, with separate winter quarters set up

for the Chinese and Irish labourers. Then, when all this hard work was eventually finished, America decided that it preferred cars and aeroplanes after all.

Who needs land anyway, when you can occupy cyberspace? That was the question explored in *Virtual Spires* (Radio 3, Saturday). Accompanied by a Dutchman called Simon Says, the listener entered a virtual world accessible only on the computer screen. As a piano plunked eerily in the background, we heard Simon Says describe the pretend world that he and his virtual neighbours have created. "It's very nice scenery," he said. "All snowy." There were cathedral walls he could fly through, if he so wished, and breathtaking architecture within. Obviously, of course, we couldn't see any of this on the radio, and had to rely entirely on what Simon Says said.

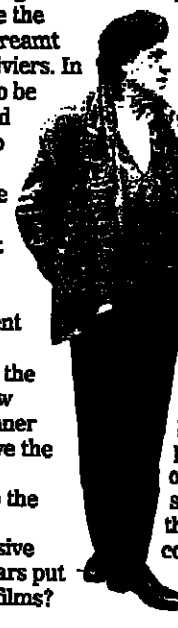
ARTS DIARY
DAVID LISTER

CURIOUS. THE Laurence Olivier Awards that you may have seen on TV this week were missing the moments I remember best from the ceremony I attended. Edited out was Mark Little's hilariously ill-judged opening cry of "Welcome to Planet Luvvie" and the resounding silence from the audience of thespians who loathe the phrase. Also cut was Trevor Nunn's attack on the critics who had questioned his wisdom in putting on *OklaHoma!* It must, though, have been ineptitude that made the BBC cut Kevin Spacey's emotional reminiscences of coming to the theatre in London as a child, as well as his being overwhelmed at receiving an award from Lady Olivier.

What was shown? The one unoriginal part of his speech, thanking the rest of the cast. Who edits these things? Perhaps they are the same people who dream up the new-look Oliviers. In a clumsy attempt to be dramatic, the award of Best New Play to *The Weir* was not announced until the following week, which meant that it received little publicity. Andre Ptaszynski, president of the Society of London Theatre, is the godfather of the new format. He says dinner jackets and glitz give the wrong image of the theatre. Really? Do the red carpets and outlandish expensive fashions of the Oscars put people off going to films?

SIR PETER HALL's launch of the Shadow Arts Council at the Olivier Awards was, however, a suitably dramatic moment. Thus was born an anti-government body of the great and the glamorous, including such luminaries as Sir Tom Stoppard (below). They had met in secret the day before, Sir Peter revealed. This was a surprise to everyone, including Stoppard: it was the first he'd heard of it. Sir Peter said the new Shadow Arts Council would be a port of call for the press with queries about the true state of the arts. OK. First question: at this secret meeting, who was the tall, curly-haired bloke impersonating Tom Stoppard?

ARTSPEAK AWARD of the week goes to Mark McCormack's International Management Group, the sports marketing guru that has set up IMG Arts Projects. It says it has been formed "to meet a need for arts management consultants who were also experienced arts professionals with a strong business edge and corporate ties who were willing to provide clients with daily hands-on assistance with performing arts projects such as managing performance venues and performing arts organisations". Ah, you say, that's not artspeak, that's management consultantspeak. But is there any longer a difference?



THE BOOKS INTERVIEW

Finding the exit from hell

Lewis Wolpert's depression brought more pain than his wife's death. Julie Wheelwright asks why

A psychiatrist friend of mine described meeting a former patient in a lobby of the National Theatre. Since the man had ended his treatment, my friend made his way through the crush to enquire how he was. But although the psychiatrist had seen his patient through a terrifying bout of mental illness, the man felt unable to acknowledge him. When he saw the doctor coming, he turned and melted into the crowd. Despite its prevalence, sufferers from mental illness still bear stigma of weakness and shame.

The facts, however, are indisputable: depression remains a hidden seam of misery within our society. The charity SANE fields 1,000 calls per week, the majority from people with clinical depression. One person in five suffers from depression at some point in their lives. In the UK, more than 5,000 people commit suicide every year; more than 100,000 make a serious attempt. The World Health Organisation predicts that, by 2020, depression will top the global chart as the most pervasive serious illness, more pervasive than either heart disease or cancer.

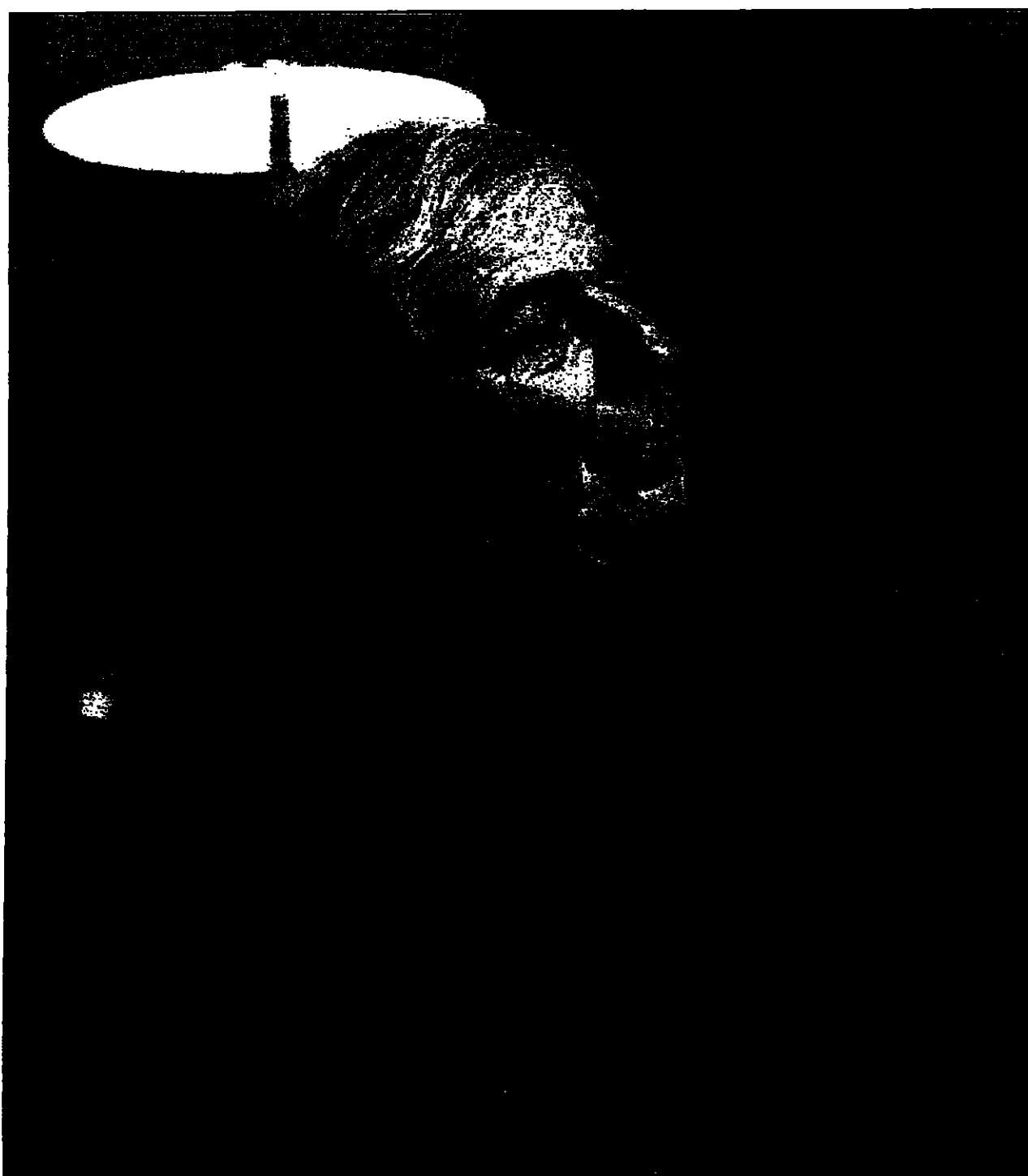
Lewis Wolpert, biology professor at University College, London, has stepped out of the closet to describe his own slide into depression and to provide sufferers with a deeper understanding of the illness. *Malignant Sadness: the anatomy of depression* (Faber, £9.99), which accompanies a BBC2 series, chronicles the intense despair that led him to an obsession with suicide and finally to find redemption in a psychiatric ward. The book is striking in its clarity about the mind's capacity to swing out of control and in our growing understanding that such events may be triggered by neurochemicals rather than simple human tragedy.

Wolpert argues that unless you have suffered depression, you cannot begin to imagine its torture. In the hierarchy of pain, he believes his illness was worse than witnessing in 1997 the death from breast cancer of his beloved second wife, Jill Neville, the Australian writer. "I am ashamed to admit that my depression felt worse than her death," he writes, "but it is true. I was in a state that bears no resemblance to anything I had experienced before."

There is a delicious irony in meeting Professor Wolpert to discuss the darkest moments of his depression. Deemed the "lord high contradictory" by Jill Neville, he rocks with an intellectual passion, is unafraid to admit his frailties and appears to have an unquenchable appetite for life. Within seconds of meeting we have launched into a conversation about cycling, since I have appeared with my helmet tucked under my arm, and he is a committed urban cyclist. We squeeze into his closet-sized office, piled high with books, papers and coffee cups, to sit on dilapidated chairs. The February sun streaks through grimy windows; all is right with the world.

Then Wolpert delves back into the time when doubt, anxiety and despair enfolded him. It was before Jill became ill: they had a happy marriage, he had a great job and was looking forward to travelling to his former home in South Africa. But when he developed atrial fibrillation (a common and non-threatening arrhythmia of the heart), he began to fantasise about falling ill and dying in a remote place. "I began to feel very weird. I can describe it no other way."

Wolpert realised he was ill when he be-



LEWIS WOLPERT, A BIOGRAPHY

Born in South Africa in 1929, Lewis Wolpert trained as an engineer and once had a job with the Israel Planning Department. He then became a cell biologist in London. He is chairman of the Royal Society's Committee

for the Public Understanding of Science and was awarded the CBE in 1990. His books include *A Passion for Science*, *The Triumph of the Embryo* and, with Alison Richards, *The Unnatural Nature of Science*. The sci-

tific research of his own that brought public attention followed a fertilised egg from embryo to new-born infant. He also presents many radio programmes on science. His second wife, the novelist Jill Neville, died in 1997.

came obsessed with thoughts about suicide, which grew more insistent over several weeks. He stopped functioning, shedding all the activities that gave him intense pleasure, such as working, writing and cycling. His wife was convinced the trip to South Africa (where his father was murdered 20 years before), along with his impending retirement, had fuelled the depression.

Then suddenly, he was unable to sleep and began to take tranquillisers. "It took only

a few weeks before I had descended into depression," he says, the furrows increasing in his usually animated face. "I was suicidal, I thought I was going mad."

His waking moments were consumed with planning his exit, as he hoarded his heart pills and sleeping tablets. "My wife was very angry and thought that my behaviour was totally unfair to her and to the children. So she told me that if I still felt the same in a year's time, she would help

me commit suicide." When I ask if he thought she meant it, he insists, as tears well up in his eyes, "yes, absolutely".

"Jill never understood my depression, it was a total mystery to her." But her breaking-point with Wolpert was the catalyst for him to seek professional help, in the psycho-geriatric ward at the Royal Free Hospital in north London. There he began his journey back to mental health. After a course of anti-depressants and many

sessions of cognitive therapy, his fractured sense of self began to re-integrate. Another irony surfaces. Despite Jill Neville's steady physical decline, Wolpert says that she never became depressed. There was rage and sadness, but never the descent into that black pit of utter despair.

Four years after the gloom lifted, Wolpert's book reflects his ability to take a forensic approach to his experience. A research scientist, he has assembled the latest findings on depression while providing an historical and social context for them. By dissecting our social history, he reveals our fears and confusion, and why we are unable to shake off a sense of shame.

"Even I haven't escaped the stigma," he admits. "I was recently giving a big lecture in Geneva and this friend of mine kept asking, 'why do you think your depression was biological?' Even I insist mine was triggered by a drug that I was taking for my heart and, of course, it had no psychological base."

But *Malignant Sadness* suggests a complex interplay between the brain and the psyche. This provides the book's most fascinating insights. Studies of identical twins provide, for example, strong evidence for a genetic component in depression, suggesting its heritability at more than 50 per cent. Almost a quarter of those with depression have close relatives who have also suffered from a depressive illness. There is also the mystery of why, in 40 per cent of depressions, an individual improves with little or no intervention at all.

There is no scientific formula for mental health, just as there are few clues to what can turn grief into full-blown clinical depression. "Apart from bereavement, it is not always easy to identify significant life events in a depressed patient's life," he writes. "Memory has a variable reliability, and there may well be a distortion of events, for example, the overemphasising of an event in order to make the depression more understandable." So while many schools of psychotherapy encourage patients to script a meaningful narrative of their history, the depressive may also need help to right a chemical imbalance.

"We want and need to know how emotions and thinking can affect the chemistry of the brain and how the chemistry of the brain affects our thinking and feeling," writes Wolpert. He argues that drugs and the talking cure each have their place. However, there are people who can overcome a depression simply through a limited number of psychotherapeutic sessions. So why, he asks, are NHS patients so readily offered drugs and so rarely therapy? The answer comes down to cost. There are frightening suggestions emanating from the US that the benefits of psychotherapy are being denigrated simply because insurance companies consider it too expensive.

Our best hope for finding a cure for depression might lie in biological research, but Wolpert doesn't dismiss the importance of raising social awareness. Now that he has so boldly gone public about his illness, he has discovered colleagues and even close friends who have also struggled to survive the malignant sadness. His realises they all share a relief at escaping from this living hell and the haunting fear that it may return. "It is still miraculous that I am back to normal. I feel like Lazarus risen from the dead and given a second chance."

Lewis Wolpert's series 'A Living Hell' starts on BBC2 on Wednesday 3 March.

COVER STORIES



A SURPRISE treat for Stephen King fans. Despite comments that he might not write any more books, the prolific author has taken his publishers by surprise, producing an unscheduled novel to be published in April. "An unexpected pregnancy" is how he has described *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, a story of a little girl lost who listens to baseball games and believes herself a friend of Tom Gordon, in fact as in fiction a pitcher with the Boston Red Sox. Gordon has "blessed" the book and each of the games described actually happened - King is a serious fan. The novel is being rushed through to be on sale before the baseball season opens on 13 April.

PENNY JUNIOR, whose recent opus attempted a rehabilitation of Charles by a debunking of Diana (which prompted death threats on her US tour), has another subject in her sights: Sir Elton John, of whom she is no particular fan. She's doubtless planning more muck-raking but, since Elton has pretty much confessed all and fans won't pay good money for warts only, publishers are not too keen. Nor should they be, given the cold shower HarperCollins took on Junior's Charles book.

A GOOD month for Beryl Bainbridge. Following her Author of the Year Award, she has won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *Master Georgie*. At £3,000, it's not as valuable as the Booker or the Whitbread, but Bainbridge is not known for avarice. Just so long as she has enough to keep her in ciggies.

FOLLOWING MONTHS of accepting the applause on behalf of father Ted, Frieda Hughes this week takes a bow as a poet. *Woolooloo*, published this week by Bloodaxe Books, inhabits territory familiar to readers of her half-dozen children's books and fans of her paintings. Unsurprisingly, death and abandonment are among the themes explored in a collection that bears the simple dedication "For Daddy with love".

HEINEMANN CLAIMS that *True At First Light*, the "new" Ernest Hemingway work it will publish in the summer, has only just been discovered. In fact it's been known about for years; but son Patrick decided it should not appear until after the death of Papa's widow Mary, as the semi-fictional journal features a liaison with an African woman. The contract was finally agreed in Paris, at the Ritz, on what turned out to be the morning following Dodi and Diana's last supper.

THE LITERATOR

Macho boyos and the hoodlums

Tobias Jones tramps our own mean streets and meets a crack squad of hard-boiled Brits

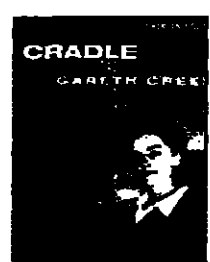
THERE'S NO such thing as innocence," wrote Mickey Spillane in his noir classic, *Kiss Me Deadly*: "innocence touched with guilt is as good a deal as you can get." That line has become the *leitmotif* of the hard-boiled, hard-bitten genre in which everyone is soiled and cynical. American literature has always had a rich seam of this urban gothic fiction, full of paranoia and private eyes: Dashiell Hammett, Chester Himes, Raymond Chandler, Elmore Leonard, James Ellroy, Walter Mosley.

Until recently, British crime-writing has been set more amid the spires than the mean streets. Aggressive, taut writing about urban criminality has appeared, usually only to veer into the surreal or else to be hijacked by boasts of manic drug-ingestion (step forward the usual suspects: Jeff Noon, Irvine Welsh, Will Self).

Now, though, a clutch of thrillers is reinventing the genre for British tastes. The received wisdom is that today's male writing is suddenly touchy-feely; but these thrillers come not with the "scent of dried roses" but with the whiff of cordite. Why now? It may be that years of club drugs and Conservatism have served up the same paranoia as McCarthyism and the Cold War did during the flowering of Ameri-



Five Pubs, Two Bars and a Nightclub
by John Williams
Bloomsbury £9.99, 224pp



Cradle to Grave
by Garth Creer
Anchor £9.99, 336pp



Losing Faith
by Daniel Blythe
Hamish Hamilton £9.99, 256pp

can "pulp culture" in the 1950s. Like then, we live at a time of rampant paperback publishing: more than 100,000 books published last year in Britain, and a fiction market worth over £220 million. The gothic of guns-and-girls, enclosed between lurid covers, is now likely to yield a fatter slice of that pie than an Agatha.

Also, hard-boiled fiction - with its simple, scenic plot progressions - translates easily to celluloid. Chandler and Hammett doubled as screenwriters, and recently the retro-glam of *Devil in a Blue Dress* or *LA Confidential* have introduced bourbon-swilling private eyes to a new generation. With a revitalised British film industry, authors with ambition want

films made of their books, and so will skew their writing into appropriate genres. Already James Hawes's *A White Merc With Fins* (not quite noir, but certainly gris) is in production. Others are hoping to follow.

John Williams's linked set of stories *Five Pubs, Two Bars and a Nightclub* (a dreadful title for a brilliant book) has all the right raw ingredients. As the blurb has it: "Gangsters, pimps, dealers, bookies and the Nation of Islam. Welcome to Cardiff." It's notoriously difficult to fake the streetwise underworld, but Williams has already written a factual book about crime in Cardiff's docklands, *Bloody Valentine*, and his book rings true through every twist and turn.

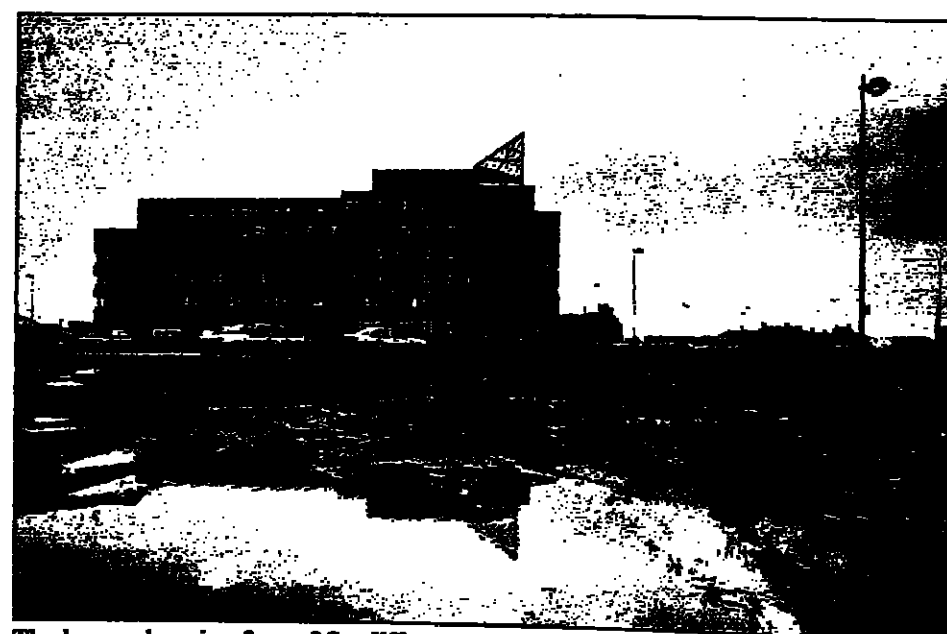
This is an ensemble piece about black gangsters in Cardiff, with drug-deals, prostitution and a pirate radio station. Tony, recently released from prison, suddenly finds himself caught in a gang war between his cousin Billy and Kenny Ibrahim, a Malcolm X wannabe. The book has all the classic traits of urban noir: slick plot, cold-blooded betrayals and withering one-liners.

But Williams toys wonderfully with the genre. Seemingly aware of the difficulties of a straight, boyo adoption of Harlem patois, he apes Americanisms while satirising them. He uses the word "bitches" only to qualify it: "like they say in the down-in-the-hood movies." He mocks the use of

"yardie": "the closest they've been to Jamaica's a day trip down Porthcawl." His stories are refreshingly realistic about the small-timers, full of bit-part dealers using hydroponic gear to grow their grass and people pumping just to make some cash.

Daniel Blythe's *Losing Faith* and Garth Creer's *Cradle to Grave* promise almost exactly the same sinister formula. Blythe's blurb offers "experiments with drugs, sex and violence"; Creer's an "underworld of clubs, drugs and obsessive lust". They both, of course, also have an exotic, albeit suspicious, death, and a lot of authorial sleuthing. Both, by the way, come to the genre not via the streets but the lecture hall: Blythe is completing a doctorate in German Romanticism, while Creer has a PPE degree and an MA in creative writing.

The whispers of Blythe's characters "echo as loud as gunshots", and Creer's book is full of wonderfully short, jaded sentences: "The sun is out now, steaming urban reprisals" or "Babies cry, mothers swear Dogs roam." Set against the urban backdrop of London, all elements of humanity in *Cradle to Grave* are diminished: "the platform is oozing bodies back into the corridor. The mass shifts. People jockey like



The less welcoming face of Cardiff

Tom Pilston

maggots going nowhere".

There's the requisite grim description of the murder victim, recreating that Hollywood moment when the tarpaulin is pulled back from the cadaver: "It is a face she knows, can't recognise. It looks up from wire and plaster. Skin hangs from the wire, finely stitched in places, along an arm. Wire fingers poke out from the flesh. It doesn't look human."

Like Williams, Creer - as is traditional in the genre - deploys some literal noir, creating a character who would in the original tingo have been called a "negro". The genre has always had its fair share of black writers (like Himes or Mosley), using skin colour as a metaphor for marginality. But

for white writers, the black character becomes an expression of the Other something exciting or threatening. Creer's Ruben King is an artist, an overtly risqué and sexual being who scrapes away at white, bourgeois pretence: "his words are like a knife that doesn't cut".

If the hard-boiled has easily accommodated different skin colours, women have normally been introduced only as *femmes fatales* or lust-interests. Unusually, both Blythe and Creer have strong central female characters. Blythe's Faith is a magnetic character, the centre of a group of college friends; and Creer's novel revolves around Anna, rebuilding her life after job dismissal and her husband's infidelity.

Because these "modern" women are not victims, but loose, drug-taking types, the novels lose no machismo but gain bitchiness ("Doesn't she do graphs of her cellulite level?" asks Faith). This is the Nineties version of noir, less male-dominated but still abounding in cynicism, a world in which (to use Chandler's phrase) characters look at each other "with the clear innocent eyes of a couple of used car salesmen".

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Scary tales of an old spice world

Aromatics used to be the only way to modify our food, and maritime nations fought to gain control of the trade.

Charles Nicholl catches a whiff of history

The "spice race" – the battle between European powers for control of the spice-producing islands of the East Indies – has a sound of aromatic romance about it, but the reality was a story of greed and violence, of high risks and astronomical profits. It is this story that Giles Milton's entertaining new book sets out to tell. *The Nathaniel* of the title is a doggedly courageous sea-captain, Nathaniel Courthope, who raised the English flag on a tiny island called Run in 1616.

The medieval European spice market had been dominated by Venice, with its close trading links with Constantinople and points east. During the 16th and 17th centuries, efforts were made by the new maritime nations – Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and England – to break this monopoly by getting straight to the source and cutting out the Venetian middle-man. The discovery of the New World was an early by-product of this quest: the land-mass of America was, indeed, an obstacle to the proposed new route to the Spice Islands. Magellan set out on his great circumnavigation of the globe in 1519-32 with the precise intention of solving this geographical problem.

The Spice Islands were specifically the Moluccas, a scattering of islands at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago, where sub-tropical microclimates created the perfect conditions for arboreal thoroughbreds such as *Myristica fragrans*. This tall, laurel-like tree produces a lemon-sized fruit, the dried seed of which is nutmeg. The word is a truncated Anglicisation of the French *noix musquée*, which in turn comes from the Latin *nux muscata*, or the "musky nut".

In early 17th-century England, nutmeg might be called the spice of choice. It had been used in England long before that, of course: Chaucer's Sir Topaz liked to sprinkle some into his ale; cooks used it with meat, both as a preservative (it slows down the oxidation process) and as a mask for rotteness; and it was endowed with the usual range of curative and aphrodisiac properties. But in Elizabethan times nutmeg acquired a new cachet, for a "po-mander of nutmeg" was trumpeted by the physicians and quacksalvers as a sovereign remedy against the plague.

Milton's book focuses on the jockeying between the English and the Dutch for dominance of the nutmeg trade. In these days of stacked supermarket shelves, it is



Nathaniel's Nutmeg
by Giles Milton
Hodder & Stoughton, £12.99, 388pp

hard to imagine just how difficult to obtain certain foodstuffs were, and how immensely profitable they became as a result. In the early 17th century, 10lbs of nutmegs purchased for less than a penny in the Banda Islands – the small group in the southern Moluccas where the nutmeg-tree grew most profusely – could be sold in London for £2 10s: a mark-up of 60,000 per cent, comparable to today's drug-trade figures. Pepper, meanwhile, climbed in price to 8 shillings per lb. (To put this into context, a skilled labourer counted himself lucky to earn 5 shillings a week.)

This was the kind of bottom-line which fired the captains and mariners of the spice race, and the merchant-adventurers of the East India Company which bankrolled them. After much prevarication, the Company's charter was signed by Queen Elizabeth on 31 December 1600, granting its founder members – 218 in all – exclusive rights over "traffic and merchandise" in the East Indies.

Getting the royal signature was only a small part of the problem. The East India voyage was fraught with dangers, and the Dutch – though nominally the allies of England – were tough and, when need arose, brutal opponents. The various Moluccan headmen played off both sides of this colonial invasion as well as they could.

In the first 10 years of the East India Company, three English expeditions set out. Out of 12 vessels, four sank or disappeared; and out of an estimated 1,200 crew members, two thirds died, mostly of the endemic shipboard diseases of scurvy, typhoid and the "bloody flux", or dysentery. Only one ship, James Lancaster's *Ascension*, actually reached the fabled Banda Islands, and only one English "factory" (or depot) was established, at Bantam on Java.

All this is the context for what Milton



The Dutch land on Staten Island in 1641

Mary Evans

takes to be the central English episode of this colonial spice-war: the efforts of Captain Nathaniel Courthope to claim for England the tiny atoll of Run, whose mountainous interior yielded an annual harvest of over 300,000lbs of nutmegs. He guided his ship, the 400-ton *Swan*, through the treacherous reefs of Run in December 1616, and held out against overwhelming odds for four years, before a Dutch bullet killed him in late 1620. It is a story of great, if doomed, courage. The torture of both English and Oriental captives by the Dutch commander, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, makes harrowing reading.

Unfortunately – and herein lies a weakness of Milton's book – we learn very little about the eponymous Nathaniel

Courthope. Nothing seems to be known about his life prior to this episode, except that he had been in the region before. We have no idea where he hailed from, how old he was, or what he looked like. It is possible that diligent research might have filled the first two of these lacunae. As it is, Courthope remains firmly anchored to the rather bland tones of his journal, which is to be found, among hundreds of similar documents, in that mammoth compendium of travellers' tales, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, edited by the Jacobean vicar Samuel Purchas and published in 1625.

The subtitle, "how one man's courage changed the course of history", is also rather dubious. What it boils down to is that the venal rivalry between the English and

Dutch in the East Indies was a factor in their later confrontations in North America, including the wresting of Manhattan Island from the Dutch. Courthope played a part in this background, but was hardly a prime cause, and it is anyway debatable how far the creation of New York out of New Amsterdam changed the world.

Both these complaints concern the packaging of the book. They may perhaps be addressed to the publishers rather than the author, since the overall thrust is obvious. The book is supposed to look, sound and feel like *Dava Sobel's Longitude*, whose unexpected success out of a slim volume of obscure history has become something of a grail among publishers.

The fact is that *Longitude* had precisely

what this book lacks: a strong, well-documented and very human protagonist. Nonetheless, Milton narrates with an easy and readable style the story of these English adventurers among the atolls and skerries of the Moluccas.

I particularly liked the chapter about William Keeling, commander of the *Red Dragon*, who beguiled the long voyage to the Spice Islands in 1607 by indulging his passion for the theatre.

When the fleet stopped off to restock its provisions on the coast of Africa, his crew actually put on a production of *Hamlet*. This performance among the mangrove swamps of Sierra Leone must surely be the first production of a Shakespearean play outside Europe.

Stop the capital depreciation

LITERARY FESTIVALS sprout these days in plate-glass libraries or colonnaded market-halls right across the land. Yet the capital of English letters has never thrown a writers' party of its own. All that will change between 19 and 28 March, when the first London Festival of Literature, "The Word", unites 66 authors (half from the UK, half from abroad) in a 10-day "carnival celebration" of writing. So far, so cheerily upbeat. The Word's ambitious programme – with luminaries stretching from Germaine Greer and Terry Pratchett to Toni Morrison – deserves a fair wind and warm welcome.

But something about this fairground-barker style contradicts the literary essence of the host city. Especially in its incomparably rich fiction, London writing likes to dwell on secrets and silences; on mystery and murk. The old pea-souper fog, after all, survived as a handy metaphor long after Clean Air Acts had

A WEEK IN BOOKS



BOYD TONKIN
London's fictional fabric has fallen into disrepair

driven it from actual streets. From the Charles Dickens of *Oliver Twist* to the Martin Amis of *The Information*, London novelists plunge into private worlds that unfold in shadows, not in spotlights. Here in the Smoke, every culture turns into a subculture. The new issue of *Granta* (London: the times of the city, £8.99) confirms this metropolitan taste for hidden and hermetic tales. This must count as one of the magazine's

strongest numbers, with 350 pages that encompass Graham Swift, Hanif Kureishi, Helen Simpson, Will Self, Philip Hensher and many others, along with favourite "London Views" depicted by the likes of Julian Barnes, Penelope Lively and Iain Sinclair, who hymns the "molten apocalypse" of Docklands.

For the Londoner writer, nothing that matters exists merely on the surface. Dale Peck offers a gay expat's view of secret East End trysting grounds; Ferdinand Dennis investigates his own past to solve the "puzzle" of the allegorical Africans carved on the Albert Memorial; Jay Rayner meets Shirley Porter to discover the why, as well as the how, of Westminster gerrymandering; Ian Parker unmasks the concealed cops who monitor London traffic; the Kew housewife in Helen Simpson's story reads millennial prophecies into the planes that slack overhead. And Will Self imagines London bricks as arcane texts, "the spines of buried tablets, covered in cuneiform script". To crack these codes, we need access to the books that may decipher them. Yet many metropolitan classics have fallen into out-of-print limbo. Skim through the excellent new *Waterstone's Guide to London Writing* (£2.99), and the phrase "not currently in print" tolls like Bow bells on every other page. Michael Moorcock's *Mother London*; Colin MacInnes's seminal *Absolute Beginners* trilogy; Henry Green's great London novels; Derek Raymond's *Swire* masterpiece *I was Dore*; *Swire* publishers' disdain for their own backlist has killed these and other major works. It is like reading the list of bulldozed City churches, and just as dismal a record of cultural vandalism. A tiny fraction of the Lottery money now spent on London bricks and mortar could restore the capital's literary fabric. Time for strong words at The Word?

A meal of lame males

Jack O'Sullivan has had his fill of masculine guilt. Time for a lie-down?

MY GREAT regret about broken relationships with girlfriends used to be lost history. They seemed to take my emotional past with them, memories of feelings they helped me articulate and to which only they held the key. Male relationships contained other treasures, but were not where these secrets were revealed.

"Without women, men are bereft," writes Jonathan Rutherford, taking up this theme of dependency. "They lose the story of their lives." Indeed, as Rutherford's title suggests, he believes that, in the absence of women, men cannot access their own humanity. Our masculinity exiles us from ourselves. The consequence, he believes, of such an inadequacy is that men feel uncomfortable needy of women. So we plough prodigious amounts of energy into escaping "Men," he argues, "have celebrated being alone in order to imagine them-



I Am No Longer Myself Without You: an anatomy of love by Jonathan Rutherford
Flamingo, £12.99, 184pp

selves free of women, free from their vulnerability." In this need also lies, he suggests, a hatred that some men feel for women. Our emotional vulnerability leads us to divorce sex from love. We dare not link sexual desire with emotional need. To do so is too dangerous, leaving us prey to unbearable loss. So, for example, we rely on porno-

graphic images of women. "Here, unlike in the real world, women are willing to be the objects of desire rather than the subjects of love..." The woman in pornography is men's defence against their own need and their disgust that desire ends in the extinction of the self.

This book, like much modern writing about men, is rather depressing and self-flagellating. There is plenty of guilt; perhaps worse, blame is levied by an almost biological determinism. Our predicament, concludes Rutherford, is that we are doomed never to get over the loss of our mothers. Such a fatalistic tone means that, although his descriptions of some male traits ring true, his conclusions render one passive.

The book lacks any inspiration for revolution. Rutherford seems to believe that all a poor bloke can hope for is to find a good woman, throw his lot in with her and hope for the best

as a dependent. I profoundly disagree. My recommendation for any man who has difficulty gaining access to a sense of his own self is to find a good therapist. I did. It works. The process can take a long time and there are lots of awful practitioners. But it's better than spending your life with an emotional limp while looking for a female pair of crutches.

As a result, I reclaimed my own history. Once you do this, you can still love women without being utterly destroyed by their absence. Rutherford also fails to realise that it is possible for a man, just like a woman, to internalise many of his mother's skills and, where a father may have been lacking, to fill in the missing bits. We are not doomed by biology, childhood or culture. Sadly, books like this neglect the great inheritance of masculinity – a history of personal power and change.

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MASSIVE SAVINGS

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See page 33

THE INDEPENDENT magazine

Shining hours with the divine dishwashers

Alison Joseph praises the modern women who went looking for God – and found Her behind convent walls



New Habits
by Isabel Losada
Hodder & Stoughton, £7.99, 196pp

SOMETIMES I think that God only uses human beings to force her way down here in some way... by changing yourself a lot of prayers can be answered." This book is full of surprises. Sister Rose, quoted above, is one of 10 women interviewed, all novice nuns who have given up their former lives to join a convent. Isabel Losada first got the idea when one of her friends announced that she was going to become a nun. So intense was the response – "You can't be serious!" "Will they lock you up?" "Do you hate sex?" – that Losada decided to find out more. She visited a convent, expecting a

"joyless silence." She found laughter and peace. Why would these women give up homes, cars, jobs, relationships to wear, in some cases, medieval habit, to swear vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; and, in enclosed orders, to shut themselves away with only a rare annual holiday in which to see their families? Losada has allowed the sisters to talk at length, and the results are searching and honest. Yes, celibacy can be hard. Yes, obedience can be even harder. "Before we put the plates in the dishwasher we wash them, and then afterwards we dry them. Why do we need to dry them?"

If you leave them for just a few minutes, they'll get dried on their own. God will dry them. But no, it's community. So we dry them." All the women have taken different paths, yet a common picture emerges of childhoods spent feeling something was missing; of young adults who felt set apart from friends. "One day my family were all sitting discussing what we had wanted to do when we grew up and someone said, 'When Judy was four she wanted to be a nun!' And everybody roared with laughter... I thought, Oh help, what am I going to do? I was 20 and I still wanted to be a nun."

Some stumbled upon the religious life through a TV documentary, or wandering into a church, or, in Sister Esther's case, through a vision. What all 10 women have in common is a sense of being, in some way, called "to be ourselves, only more so", as Sister Julie says. What are we to make of this, those of us living in the secular world, confronted by women who quite openly discuss their dialogue with God? Their language of faith sits uneasily within contemporary discourse of individual desire, tempting us perhaps to attribute the leanings of these women to some kind of subconscious urge pro-

jected on to an idea of God. This is why Losada has chosen so wisely to remove herself from the book. For the women's words shine through with such clarity that we are drawn into a world where God's love can be discussed in absolute terms. Indeed, perhaps it is somehow appropriate, at the end of the millennium, to find a book that gives voice to our human yearning, to this sense of our incompleteness, our desire to be "more fully ourselves". After all, the same language has been spoken in monastic communities for centuries; it has just taken all those same centuries to allow God to be She.

INSPIRATIONS

WRITER DAVID LODGE

The place
San Francisco and the Bay Area – the perfect marriage of culture and nature. The city offers sophisticated urban pleasures, but in half an hour you can drive across the Golden Gate Bridge into Marin County, with its sandy beaches and redwood forests. Across the Bay Bridge in another direction is Berkeley, home to one of the greatest universities, and some of the cleverest people, in the world.

The play
The first production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956 was like a trumpet blast, announcing the advent of a new literary generation that was rebellious without being pretentious, and articulate without being posh. I saw it as a serviceman on leave, fresh from being ordered about by types like Nigel, the chinless wonder from Sandhurst.

The film
A Matter of Life and Death by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger had a powerful effect on me when I saw it in adolescence in the late Forties. The opening sequence, in which the British fighter pilot in his



burning plane and the young WAAF speaking to him by radio fall in love, which is never relaxed.

The artwork
Ford Madox Brown's *The Last of England*, in the Birmingham Art Gallery. A young couple look sadly out of the frame, from the deck of a boat taking them to a new but uncertain life in the colonies. The woman holds the tiny fingers of an infant concealed under her cloak. You can invent your own story about what has brought them to this pass.

The music
It's hard to beat Elgar for emotionally stirring music. I will plump for the *Enigma Variations*. Listening to *Nimrod* on my Walkman, in a jet descending through spectacular canyons of sunlight cloud, somewhere over California, I count as one of the most sublime experiences of my life.

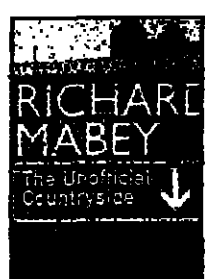
David Lodge's play *Home Truths* is published by Secker; £6.99

PAPERBACKS

BY EMMA HAGESTADT AND CHRISTOPHER HIRST

The Unofficial Countryside

FIRST PUBLISHED in 1973, this book is a revelation: beautifully written observation of how nature has taken root, built nests or dug dens in forgotten tracks of our urban sprawl. Mabey spots a soft marijuana plant in a Dagenham dump, a kestrel on Selfridge's roof and the "high-voltage spark" of a kingfisher in a wintry canal. Noting that we have the Luftwaffe to thank for the spread of Rose Bay Willow Herb (it likes scorched earth), Mabey defends the right of the giant hogweed and the "blatant and disdainfully elegant" fox to share our habitat. What a shame that this reissue is saddled with a dull cover and a high price.



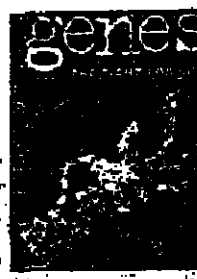
Man or Mango

AFTER THE end of a fruitless affair, something Elton decides to retreat from the world on a permanent basis. Enclosed in a country cottage bought with her dead parents' money, she stocks up her freezer with Sainsbury's exotics, hides from the milkman and develops a bad case of piles. Six years on, a roguish American poet called George gets round to missing his old girlfriend and flies back to London. A masterly study in low-level despair, Elton's ripely humorous writing is as anarchic as the emotional states she so satisfyingly describes.



Genes: the fight for life

IN HIS fascinating report from the new frontiers of micro-biology, Ford urges caution in genetic engineering. "Plants may be easy to recover [if something goes wrong], but escaped genes are not." He notes that many unnatural creations ("farm crops and domestic animals") are already with us. "If geneticists had produced a peckiness, the media would be up in arms." Ford marvels at the variety and autonomy of the cell. Self-sacrifice is displayed by single-celled organisms, even ours. "Within human adults, cells make their own decisions." Altruism, as well as selfishness, is in our genes.



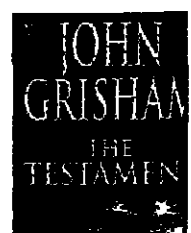
SPOKEN WORD

CHRISTINA HARDYMENT



Single & Single

SINCE SO much of the texture of a John le Carré book is built up in its details, you might think that an abridgement of his latest novel could only be a mistake. There are times when I felt a little cheated: le Carré must have written much more about the jovial Georgian heavies who lurk so menacingly on the sidelines, and the characters of the father and son whose relationship is at the heart of this novel are left too thinly drawn. But what makes it all worthwhile is John le Carré's masterful reading: fastidious and melodious as narrator, skilfully varied when his characters are speaking, and yes, very, very sexy.



The Testament

JOHN GRISHAM's style of thriller writing is very different from le Carré's. Instead of gradually showing us different sides of characters who will inexorably direct the plot, he offers a cast of instant stereotypes: a bitter millionaire on his deathbed, a greedy herd of disolute ex-wives and wastrel children towing and towed by money-grubbing lawyers, a flawed hero with a severe drink problem and an impossibly perfect heroine – a missionary in Brazil who doesn't even want the \$13 billion her unknown father leaves her. Can it end happily? You won't be able to resist listening on to find out.

The Last Resort

JENNY is that endangered species, a woman happy to be a wife. She has devoted her life to her husband, the famous naturalist Wilkie Walker, but as another East Coast winter draws in, she finds her husband becoming withdrawn; after much persuasion she gets him to abandon his L.L. Bean dressing gown for a winter break in Key West. Exploring the gaps between what people say and what they mean, Lurie lets the Wilkie Walkers loose on the Key's more exotic sun decks with unexpectedly liberating results. Lurie's first novel in 10 years – delayed gratification at its most exquisite.



Truman Capote

AN ENJOYABLE oral biography of the enigmatic writer whose trajectory reached its zenith with *In Cold Blood* before spluttering out in excess, aborted projects and vicious gossip. As one observer notes: "It's one thing to tell the nastiest story to 50 friends, it's another to set it down in cold Century Expanded type." Opinions vary from Mailer's appraisal that "he wrote the best sentences of our generation" to Gore Vidal's view that his death was "a good career move". But Bogart said "You want to put him in your pocket and take him home." You can do it with this book.



Earthly Joys

TULIPS ARE popping up everywhere in books at the moment. Philippa Gregory's latest historical novel retells the life of royal gardener John Tradescant, a man who spent the equivalent of the crown jewels on these precious blooms. A favourite of successive courts from Elizabeth I through to Charles I, Tradescant is portrayed by Gregory as a rabid perfectionist, whose one weakness is to fall under the influence of the infinitely poovoy Duke of Buckingham. Everything you could want from the genre: grand settings, romance and adventure and some reassuringly stilled dialogue.



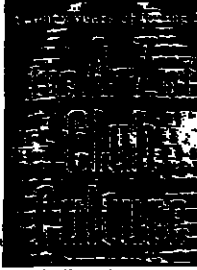
Tough, Tough Toys for Tough, Tough Boys

A CRITIC recently compared reading Will Self to being "trapped in a windowless room with a monstrously intelligent, diabolically articulate adolescent". Self's latest collection of stories shows him in a more laid-back light, his characters mellowed by the effects of illegal substances, and, in one case, a stroke. In the book's title story, a psychoanalyst drives from Scotland to London nursing a death wish as big as his four-wheel drive, while "A Story for Europe" tells the curious tale of a north London toddler who suddenly starts spouting business German.



The A-Z of Club Culture

OSBORNE OFFERS a knowledgeable guide to a milieu that will be terra incognita to many. We learn that activities in the toilets can be more energetic than on the dancefloor. But the author is pushing his luck to say that Larry Levan (née Laurence Philipot) was "possibly the most influential DJ of all time." More than Alan Freed, who invented the term "rock'n'roll"? Osborne includes entries on Club 54 and Northern Soul, but mainly this book is for the E generation. Osborne's warning is less than trenchant: "Like cigarettes, alcohol and red meat, Ecstasy can be fatal."



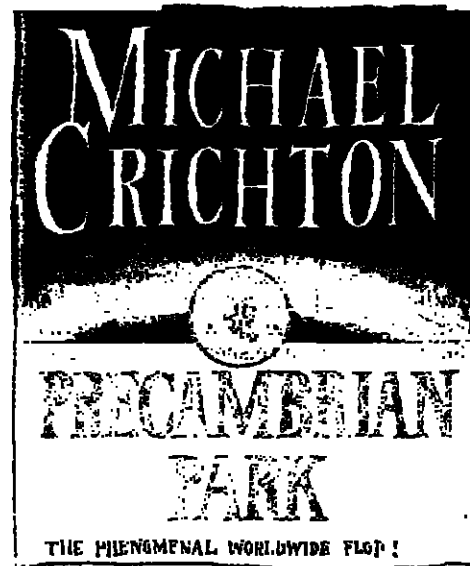
The Justice Game

IF YOU are keen for your offspring to make a career in the law courts ("a taxi plying for hire in dark suburbs"), then leave this passionate, enthralling volume lying around. Not afraid of poking fun at judges (during the Oz trial, Mr Justice Argyle asked "What do you mean by this word cummunicus?"), the Aussie-born QC has been a key player in many of the most celebrated civil liberties cases of the past 30 years, ranging from the state's ferocious assault on the ABC defendants to the farcical prosecution of the artist Boggs, who depicts banknotes.



ERRATA

by FELIX BENNETT



A BOOKING STORY ABOUT AN ISLAND OF SEDIMENTARY ROCK, CALCAREOUS ALGAE AND AMOEBAE.

BESTSELLERS

Four hundred and fifty-one happy toddlers will be chomping their way through the recipes in Annabel Karmel's *Baby Meal Planner* this week, as the doyenne of nursery food maintains her place in the cookery lists.

Nigel, Della, Rick and Ken should all be thrilled at the thought of a generation of foodie children limbering up to buy their future books. Star of the show, however, must be Anna Pavord's glorious-looking *The Tulip* which, despite costing a hefty £30, keeps on inching up the lists. By next week it should have outstripped John Grisham. Compiled by Bookwatch on sales over seven days ending 14 February 1999. © Bookwatch Ltd 1999

ORIGINAL FICTION

TITLE	AUTHOR/PUBLISHER	PRICE	WEEKLY SALES
1 (1)	<i>The Testament</i> John Grisham (Century)	£16.99	15,781
2 (2)	<i>Come Together</i> Josie Lloyd & Emyl Rees (Arrow)	£5.99	9,831
3 (3)	<i>Southern Cross</i> Patricia D Cornwell (Little, Brown)	£16.99	2,151
4 (-)	<i>Dead Souls</i> Ian Rankin (Orion)	£9.99	1,835
5 (4)	<i>Liar Birds</i> Lucy Fitzgerald (Black Swan)	£5.99	1,809
6 (8)	<i>It Means Mischief</i> Kate Thompson (Bantam)	£5.99	1,539
7 (7)	<i>Powerplay: ruthless.com</i> Tom Clancy (Penguin)	£5.99	1,482
8 (9)	<i>Messiah</i> Boris Starling (HarperCollins)	£5.99	1,452
9 (5)	<i>The Death of Amy Parry</i> T R Bowen (Penguin)	£5.99	1,405
10 (6)	<i>City Girl</i> Patricia Scanlan (Bantam)	£5.99	1,148

ORIGINAL NON-FICTION

TITLE	AUTHOR/PUBLISHER	PRICE	WEEKLY SALES
1 (3)	<i>Station X: the codebreakers</i> Michael Smith (Channel 4)	£14.99	5,763
2 (2)	<i>Men Are From Mars...</i> John Gray (Thorsons)	£8.99	5,697
3 (1)	<i>Birthday Letters</i> Ted Hughes (Faber)	£14.99	3,976
4 (4)	<i>Little Book of Feng Shui</i> Ullian Yoo (Element)	£1.99	3,285
5 (-)	<i>The Little Book of Love</i> Various (Penguin)	£1.99	3,013
6 (10)	<i>The Year 1000</i> Robert Lacey & Darryl Danziger (Little, Brown)	£12.99	2,951
7 (6)	<i>Seafood Odyssey</i> Rick Stein (BBC)	£16.99	2,714
8 (7)	<i>Notes From a Big Country</i> Bill Bryson (Doubleday)	£16.99	1,817
9 (8)	<i>Della's How to Cook</i> Della Smith (BBC)	£16.99	1,790
10 (5)	<i>The Little Book of Calm</i> Paul Wilson (Penguin)	£1.99	1,717

COOKERY/GARDENING/DIY/HOUSEHOLD

TITLE	AUTHOR/PUBLISHER	PRICE	WEEKLY SALES
1	<i>Rough Guide: the Internet 1999</i> Angus Kennedy (Rough Guides)	£5	4,067
2	<i>Little Book of Feng Shui</i> Ullian Yoo (Element)	£1.99	3,285
3	<i>Seafood Odyssey</i> Rick Stein (BBC)	£18.99	2,714
4	<i>Della's How to Cook</i> Della Smith (BBC)	£16.99	1,790
5	<i>Ground Force: weekend workbooks</i> Alan Titchmarsh (BBC)	£9.99	1,576
6	<i>The Low Fat Cookbook</i> Rosemary Conley (Century)	£16.99	1,018
7	<i>The Tulip</i> Anna Pavord (Bloomsbury)	£30	1,004
8	<i>Ken Hom Cooks Thai</i> Ken Hom (Headline)	£18.99	476
9	<i>Baby & Toddler Meal Planner</i> Annabel Karmel (Ebury)	£10.99	451
10	<i>Real Food</i> Nigel Slater (Fourth Estate)	£18.99	303

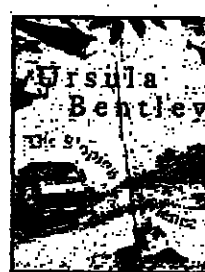
Laugh? They really tried

In search of funny fiction, Susan Jeffreys travels stony-faced from medieval crypt to stately home – but finds her comic grail in a loft

OF THESE three comic novels, Ursula Bentley's is the one with the wham-bang start. A dead father in his coffin, an incestuous brother and sister kneeling before the catafalque and a mystery blonde bidding farewell to the dear departed. In the background is a feudal thug with a doggy road-haulage business, some nasty secrets and the realisation that dead dad may have been up to no good. Soon, though, the book is mired down in mortgage problems, residential fees in old people's homes and thoughts on hygiene in the middle ages.

Brother and sister are an unlikely duo but not in an interestingly villainous way. Tim is a drip with a dicky hip; Arden, the sister, is like a cow with a truncheon. Together they live in their father's old cottage. Tim gets bits of work doing accounts and Arden ranges the countryside bullying middle-aged women into buying knitwear. It seems that long ago their dead father stole a statue of St Louis. That and other murky developments have Arden and her son Bosworth on a mission to the continent. Various skeletons are pulled out of cupboards as the whole plot comes to its woolly end. Some heavy editing and a thorough rewrite could have done wonders here.

If Ursula Bentley has drawn from her experience for the less gothic bits of the book, Wendy Holden has drawn deeply from hers for the far-frier *Simply Divine*. Jane, our heroine,



The Sloping Experience
by Ursula Bentley
Sceptre, £16.99, 326pp



Simply Divine
by Wendy Holden
Headline, £10, 343pp



Married Alive
by Julie Burchill
Orion, £9.99, 192pp

seems to have led a life pretty parallel to her creator's. She is a sensitive, talented soul, not always well treated by men. She is far cleverer, it goes without saying, than the airhead debs who work with her on the glossy magazines *Gorgeous* and *Publous*. Jane is terribly loyal to her chums, and an all-round absolute brick – although a tiny bit inclined to run to fat.

Terrible puns are strewn through the book as Jane takes on the task of ghost-writing the column of society bimboette Champagne D'Vyne. She also embarks on the job of restoring the crumbling splendour of her friend Tilly's stately home.

Tilly's mother is having an affair with an American Indian called Big Morn, and the stately home must be sold. Efficiently written, the novel cracks along to its happy ending. It never makes you laugh, though: always something of

drawback in a comic novel.

Julie Burchill's heroine in *Married Alive* (and this will come as no surprise) is a working-class girl from the West Country enjoying a disastrous marriage along with huge amounts of drugs and booze. She has certainly followed that well-worn advice "write about what you know", but there's a lot to be said in fiction for making things up. All this material from your own life is fine, but you're producing novels here, girls, not patchwork quilts.

Burchill takes us on another voyage round her father and lays out her working-class credentials. The plot doesn't stand up to much scrutiny, as our heroine Nicole brings her old gran to live with her in a loft apartment in Docklands while the din of marital battle roars around gran's head.

But Burchill can write. Dazzling passages light up the

هكذا من النظم

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 278: 1039-1044.



The greenhouse at Brandy Mount House in Alresford, Essex, is chock-full of Michael and Caryl Baron's collections of floury-leaved primulas and choice peduncles.

Russell Sachs

The glory of a spring garden

While the trees are bare, Anna Pavord enjoys the elegant lines and splendid spring bulbs of a garden opened to the public

Late winter can be an unforgiving time. I'm not thinking of the piles of soggy foliage, melted by unexpectedly hard frosts. Or the debris that mounds up in corners from evergreens battered by winds. I'm thinking of the way winter reveals the bones of a garden. All the froth is shaken off and the overall design sings out loud and clear. Or should.

The trouble is that our particular climate and the journeys of Victorian explorers mean that we can grow an extraordinarily wide range of things. A garden can become little more than a horticultural stamp collection. But even the most beautiful plant shines better in the right setting. If a garden can combine good plants with good design, visitors get the best of both worlds.

Michael and Caryl Baron have fine collections of daphnes and snowdrops, a greenhouse packed with floury-leaved primulas and a choice selection of the more difficult kinds of peony. So there is no doubting their credentials as plantsmen. But their garden, Brandy Mount House in Alresford, is well balanced in terms of its design, too.

A wide terrace in front of the house ends in a shallow raised bed packed with bulbs (sternbergias, hoop-petticoat daffodils) and some of Michael's more difficult miniature daphnes. A narrow, winding path leads between shrubs such as *Rosa virginiana* (brilliant red leaves in autumn) and the dogwood 'Midwinter Fire' (buff stems flaring into fiery orange-red), with a dense underplanting of cyclamen, ferns, rare snowdrops, corydalis and hellebores.

The lawn is thick with dwarf crocus, scillas and aconites, but with luck you will get safely round to the informal beds at the back of the garden. Here, under a fine stackyurn, are hellebores, cardamine, pulmonaria and more rare cyclamen, packed round with pine needles.

To the right of the house is an extensive area of glass. When Caryl Baron gave up her job, she felt she had to have something "to combat Michael's snowdrops" so she began collecting *Primula allionii*, a tiny plant from the maritime Alps, and *P. marginata* which is not much bigger.

The next garden opening at Brandy Mount House, Alresford (01962 732189) is on Sunday 14 March (12pm-5pm) Admission £1.50

Other gardens to visit:
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
Cliveden, Taplow, Maidenhead
Tel: 01494 522234

The head gardener, Philip Cotton, is leading a guided walk tomorrow at 11am. Admission £4.80.
Great Barfield, Bradenham
Tel: 01494 563741

Richard Nutt's fine snowdrops, displayed among hellebores. Open tomorrow (2pm-5pm). Admission £1.50.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Anglesey Abbey, Lode
Tel: 01223 811200
This 100-acre garden is home to 80 kinds of snowdrop. Open today and tomorrow (11am-4pm). Admission £3.

CORNWALL
Lanhydrock, Bodmin
Tel: 01208 73320
A Victorian granite mansion with a

fine woodland garden. Early camellias, magnolias and carpets of snowdrops. Open daily during daylight hours. Admission £3.10.

DEVON
Killerton, Broadclyst, Exeter
Tel: 01392 881345

Snowdrops, early crocuses and fine species magnolias. Open daily in daylight. Winter admission £1.
Little Cumbre, Pennsylvania Rd, Exeter (No phone calls, please)
Half an acre of mixed shrubs, with a newly acquired half acre of woodland. Open tomorrow (2pm-5pm). Admission £2.

Yonder Hill, Colaton Raleigh
Tel: 01395 567541
Tranquil garden harmonising with a

beautiful natural setting. Open Monday 21 Feb (10am-4pm). Admission £1.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Cinderford Cottage, Dymock, near Newent, Tel: 01537 890265
Unusual snowdrops, well displayed with hellebores, pulmonaria and other early spring plants. Open tomorrow (12pm-5pm). Admission £1.

HAMPSHIRE
Little Court, Crawley
Tel: 01902 776363
Comfortable garden with bantams on the lawns. Flint walls, hellebores. Open tomorrow, Mon and Tues (2pm-5.30pm). Admission £2.

The Vyne, Sherborne St John, Basingstoke Tel: 01256 881337

Naturalised snowdrops and early daffodils. Open today and tomorrow (11-4). Admission £2.50.

HEREFORDSHIRE
The Weir, Swains Hill, Hereford
Tel: 01345 125436
Sleep garden beside the river Wye. Snowdrops, chionodoxas, violets, primroses. Open Wed-Sun (11am-6pm). Admission £2.

LINCOLNSHIRE
Belton House, Grantham
Tel: 01476 566116
Snowdrops and daffodils are naturalised in the garden of this 17th-century house, TV star of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Tom Jones*. Open tomorrow (11am-3pm) £5 per car.

21 Chapel Street, Haccroby
Tel: 01778 570314
A plantsman's garden, full of troughs of rare alpine. Open today and tomorrow (11-4). Admission £1.

NORTHERN IRELAND
Castle Ward, Stranford, Co Down
Tel: 01234 881204
Fine trees, including wellingtonias and a multi-stemmed thuja. Open all year, dawn to dusk. Admission £1.75 per car.

Rowallane, Saintfield, Ballynahinch, Co Down
Tel: 01238 510131
Monterey and Scots pine, redwoods, red cedar, Douglas fir, an unusual podocarpus. Mon-Fri (10.30am-5pm). Admission £1.40.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Hodsock Priory, Blyth
Tel: 01909 591204
A one-way trail through Hodsock's famous snowdrops, ornamental dogwoods, winter-flowering honeysuckles, hellebores and *Cyclamen coum*. Open daily (10am-4pm). Admission £2.50.

STAFFORDSHIRE
Moseley Old Hall, Fordhouses, Wolverhampton
Tel: 01902 782808
Catkin-hung nut walk in a 17th-century garden. The knot garden is laid out in box. Open tomorrow (1.30pm-4pm). Admission 50p.

SURREY
Polesden Lacey, nr Dorking
Tel: 01372 458203
Magnificent setting on the north downs, with the wilder parts of the garden covered in snowdrops and

acacias. Open daily (11-dusk). Admission £2.
9, Raymead Close, Retcham
Tel: 01372 373728
Compact plantsman's garden. Good berries and winter bark. Open Sun 28 Feb (1pm-4pm). Admission £1.50.

WALES
Chirk Castle, Chirk, Wrexham
Tel: 01691 777701
A medieval Marcher fortress, sheltered by great oaks. Fine yew topiary and snowdrops. Open today and tomorrow (12pm-4pm). Admission £1.

Penrhyn Castle, Bangor, Gwynedd
Tel: 01248 553084
Queen Victoria visited this gigantic castle and planted a wellingtonia, which still survives. Open tomorrow (12pm-4pm). Admission £1.

WILTSHIRE
Lacock Abbey, Lacock, near Chippenham
Tel: 01249 730459
Romantic Victorian woodland garden carpeted with snowdrops, aconites, anemones and crocus. Open today and tomorrow (12-5). Admission £2.

Stourhead, Stourton, Warminster
Tel: 01747 841152
Britain's most famous 18th-century landscaped garden: beech woods, temples and statues laid bare. Open daily (9am-dusk). Admission £3.40 (£2.50 after 1 March).

WORKSHIRE
Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, Ripon
Tel: 01765 603888
Ornamental lakes, temples and cascades in an idealised landscape around a 12th-century Cistercian abbey. Open daily (10am-5pm) Admission £4.30.

CUTTINGS

NEWS FROM THE GARDENERS' WORLD

WISLEY, SURREY is the setting for the Royal Horticultural Society's next bonsai weekend (27-28 February). There will be lectures on the history of bonsai and demonstrations on the best way to grow them. Experts such as Colin Lewis and Peter Chan will be among the teachers and Su Chin Ee will be showing watercolours in the Chinese style. Several nurseries will set up displays in the demonstration shed next to the glasshouses and the Surrey Heath Bonsai Society will put on a show. There will be bonsai plants for sale and experts to answer

questions. All lectures will be held in the lecture room in the laboratory building. Tickets (£5 for RHS members, £10 for non-members) must be booked in advance. Send a cheque payable to the RHS, with a s.a.e. to the Admin Dept, RHS Garden, Wisley, Woking GU24 0QB.

THE UNIQUE St Helena boxwood, thought to be extinct, has recently been rediscovered by Stedson Stroud, a resident of the island. He found just one bush alive among six dead ones on a slope facing the sea, 100 metres above sea level. It had

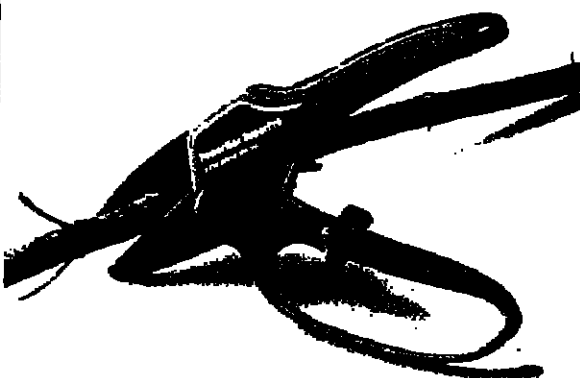
not been seen for 100 years, but Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, St Helena's Conservation Officer, has high hopes that scientists will be able to propagate the plant. The bush itself is infested with mealy bug and moth larvae and is unlikely to survive, but seeds have been collected from it and cuttings taken. More than 40 per cent of the plants on St Helena are in danger of disappearing for ever, giving the island the dubious distinction of having the world's most threatened flora. Mr Stroud's discovery is a welcome reversal.

ANNA PAVORD

THE INDEPENDENT

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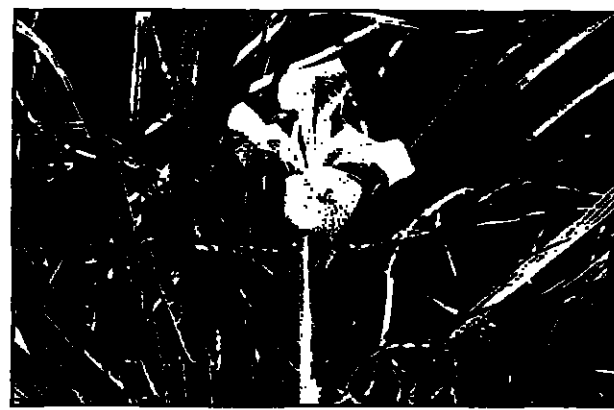
When iris eyes are smiling

The Algerian iris is so exquisite that it deserves to be looked at closely. By Ursula Buchan

FAMILIARITY MAY not always breed contempt, but it often breeds carelessness. Some of the very best flowers for my garden are under my nose (or sometimes under the noses of my friends and neighbours), yet I cannot see for looking.

When I think how beautiful are the flowers of the "Algerian iris", *Iris unguicularis*, and how accommodating it is once established, I feel ashamed that I have it growing in only one place in the garden, and scarcely give it a thought from one end of the year to the other. Until it comes into flower, that is, and then, for a brief moment, I recognise how lucky I am.

This carelessness has nothing to do with the off-putting name. In any event, for most of my formative years, this "beardless" iris was known as *Iris stylosa*, a name both memorable and perfectly easy to say. (*Stylous* refers to the fact that the "style" is united for an inch above the flower base before it breaks into three parts, which is unusual, whereas *unguicularis* means "nail" or "claw" and refers to the narrowness of the



Algerian iris: requires no fuss from the gardener. A-Z

bases of the flower segments.) I think it is because the Algerian iris is one of those plants that require no song and dance from the gardener: no exhaustive and exhausting feeding or pruning regime. In fact nothing special at all. It comes from countries which bound the Mediterranean, so it is used to hot dry summers and cool, wetter winters (which is why it flowers when it does) and emphatically does not need a rich soil. Provided you can find,

or make, an area of infertile, very gritty, preferably limy soil in a south-facing border, say, against the house wall, you have solved its cultivation problems more or less permanently. If it doesn't flower well one year, it is much more likely to be because the summer before was sunless than because the clump is overcrowded.

So what is it like, this paragon of beauty thriving on neglect? It has flowers, 5-8cm across when fully open, held on

the end of long, 15cm, smooth stalks. Inside, the three "falls" (the petals that curve over) are hairless, light purple, but with the most delicate mauve feathering on a yellow background near the base; these lines might have been painted on by a Japanese flower artist of infinite skill. The three "standards" are also light purple while the three-part "style" is mauve. The exterior of the petals, however, has the ivory pallor of a consumptive, and is thin enough for a hint of the feathering to show through. You see all that properly only when the flower is in bud and tightly furled like an umbrella.

If you pick the stalk of an unopened flower close to ground level and bring the bud inside, the flower will open quickly in the warmth and reward you with a sweet scent that will last for a couple of days. This is the best way of examining the flower, or for painting it.

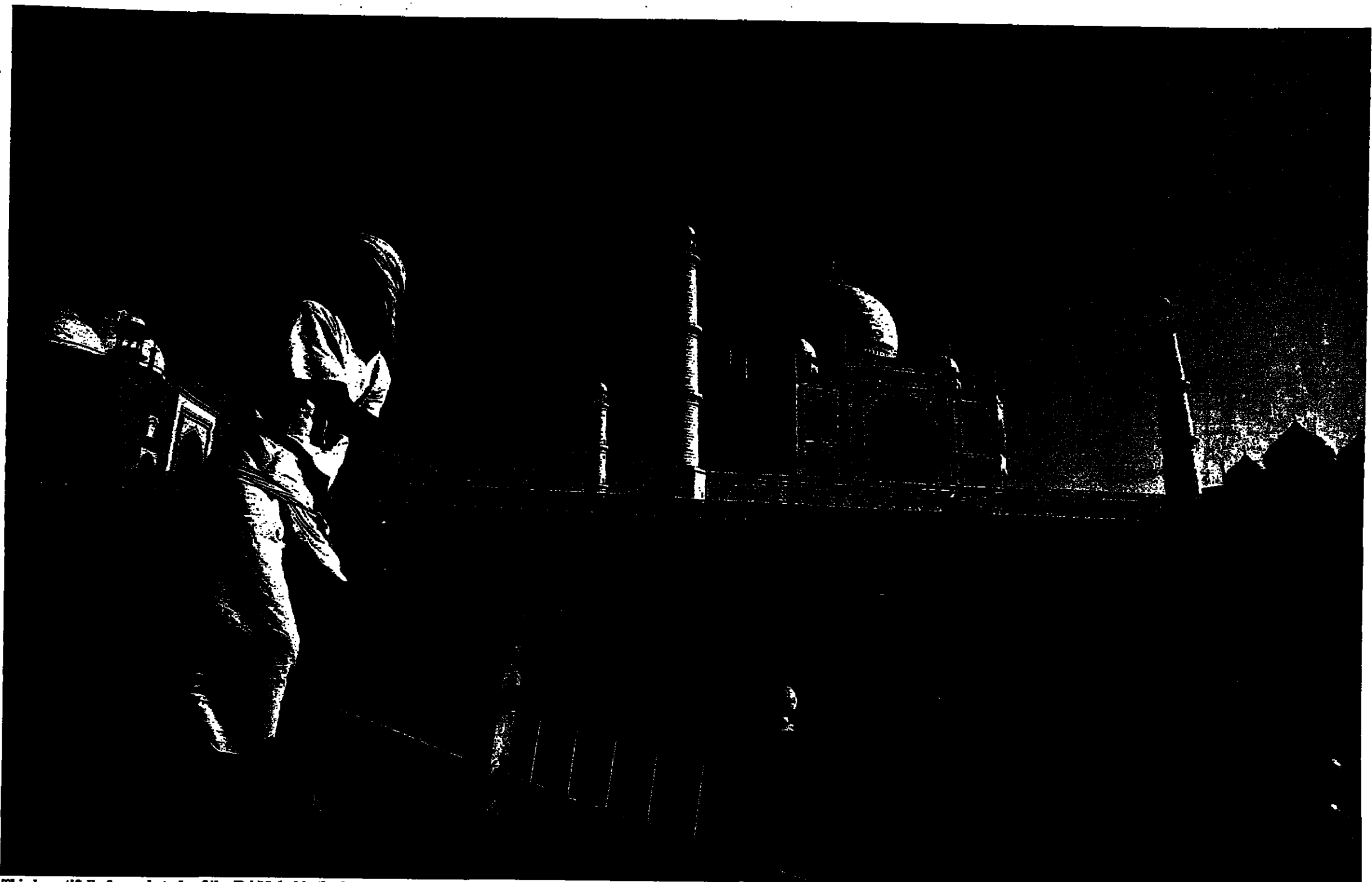
Flowers begin to unfurl in the clump that I have in the last days of December, and though each only lasts a few days, there is a succession of them

well into February. The exact flowering time depends where in the geographical range the ancestors of your plant were found. It may be as early as the autumn, or as late as February. The closely related species *Iris lazica* doesn't flower till March, and has shorter, broader foliage.

As well as one or two rare forms of *Iris unguicularis*, available only in a few specialist nurseries, there are three named selections that are widely sold. The first, 'Mary Barnard', is even more beautiful than the type because the colour is a deeper, more luxuriant purple. Paler and, to my mind, a little wishy-washy, is 'Walter Butt', and there is a white-flowered form, 'Alba'. There is also a dwarf subspecies called *cretensis*. The best time to replant the rhizomes is in September, as soon as the autumn rains have started; these should be put into the soil a little deeper than you would the rhizomes of "bearded" irises, and in as large pieces as you can beg. If you are lucky, they will flower sparsely their first winter.

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INDEPENDENT ADVICE FOR THE INDEPENDENT TRAVELLER:
FROM THE ONLY NATIONAL NEWSPAPER TRAVEL SECTION THAT REFUSES FREE TRIPS



This beautifully framed study of the Taj Mahal is the Travel Photograph of the Year - winning Nigel Hall £1,200-worth of camera equipment, plus a photographic commission for 'The Independent'. The award was made yesterday at Destinations '99 at London's Earl's Court, where all 30 finalists' work is on display (open today and tomorrow 10am-5.30pm; admission £5). The competition is organised by 'Wanderlust' magazine in association with 'The Independent' and Canon. The judges were travel photographer Jack Jackson FRPS; Paul Morrison and Lyn Hughes, publisher and editor of 'Wanderlust'; Lucy Spencer of Destinations '99; and Simon Calder, travel editor of 'The Independent'. Mr Hall wins a Canon EOS SLR with a 28-135 IS lens, plus a Billingham Photo Rucksack and Ventile Photo Vest. Another finalist appears below, left.

Break for the border

We asked readers to nominate the scariest frontier crossing. You responded with hundreds of tales of fraught frontier formalities

WHAT AN irregular lot you are: the post-bag is bulging with tales of bureaucratic hot water and cold sweats at frontiers. Thanks to all who took part; here is a salutary selection. These three writers, together with readers who wrote first-rate accounts that we just couldn't squeeze in, win the latest edition of *Wanderlust* magazine - plus a unique passport-cover guaranteed to smooth your progress across (almost) any frontier.

East Germany-Poland, 1975
I had gone through the Iron Curtain at the age of three illegally, a scary, thrilling escapade. My mother and I escaped through the forest from Czechoslovakia into Austria. Border guards on motorbikes searched the forest with huge flashlights, but missed us as we hid quivering behind tree-trunks. Now here I was in 1975, a quarter-century later, on a bus from London to Warsaw travelling with my three-year-old daughter. It was a very chilly dawn. The sight from the bus window looked like a Cold War movie set. I was very nervous. We had to pass up our passports to the bus driver. I noticed as I handed mine in that it was damp. I must have spilt something on it during the night. One of the border officials took the bunch of passports and took them up some steps to a room. "This shouldn't take long," the Polish bus driver said cheerily. We shivered and waited.

The driver couldn't understand what was taking them so long. Finally, the border official marched into the bus and started yelling at the driver, waving one of the passports. After a lot of gesticulating and more yelling, the driver turned to us and said, "you're not going to believe this, but someone passed in a wet passport. The East Germans regard it as an insult to their government and won't let the bus through until the passport has dried!" Someone piped up: "Who handed it in?" Ashamedly, I owned up, mumbling something about my child having



Elemental force: Pakistan's north-west frontier, by Raymond Jack, finalist in our photo competition

split water on it. (How low can you sink when passing the buck?) "Then go and sort this out - it wasn't for you we wouldn't be in this pickle!" I felt the accusing eyes. With a feeling of dread, I stood up and walked to the front of the bus. I stepped off the bus and walked into the glare of the spotlights and across the Tarmac. I felt I was going to my execution. All around were guards, machine-guns at the ready. I flashed back to that dark night in the forest 25 years earlier. I entered the room and saw two officials with the pile of passports, the wet one on top. I mused that it was my fault, how it had nothing to do with insulting the East German government and could they please let us through? They started shouting at me in German so I yelled back in English. If I was going to be shot, the least I could do was shout back.

After more gesticulation and toing and froing, they finally shoved the bunch of passports at me, marched me back to the bus, yelled at the driver that they didn't want this sort of thing happening again and ordered us to get on our way. As the bus started to move, the passengers cheered. I stumbled back to my seat.
DR EVA CHAPMAN
(QUEEN PROSINOWA)

Chad, 1984
I was travelling overland from London to Nairobi via West Africa in a Bedford truck with nine other people. We had spent a lot of time, and money, getting the necessary visas in Algiers. Eventually, a charming official processed our applications, charged us \$50 each and issued the visas. Apart from getting lost in the desert around the dried up edges of Lake Chad and ending up in a refugee camp, all went well until we took the wrong fork in the road and ended up in Sarh where we were arrested at a police roadblock for having forged visas. Six or seven extremely young and well-armed soldiers piled into the truck to escort us to the Minister of the Interior, who lived some 150km away. The road was extremely rough; though the soldiers were not threatening, we thought there was a very real risk of being accidentally shot or bayoneted when we drove over a pothole. The Minister of the Interior told us that the Embassy in Algiers had closed some years ago. We were to remain in the compound until the matter could be investigated. He was extremely hospitable, was not amenable to our discreet offer of a bribe and seemed pleased to have someone to talk to in the evenings.

DR EVA CHAPMAN
(QUEEN PROSINOWA)

We were generously provided with food and drink and our two days there would have been quite pleasant if we had not been so apprehensive about how long the investigation would take. Luckily for us, on the third morning two French journalists were brought in, having been arrested for having no passports and photographing the refugee camps. Our "crime" could not compare to this and after exchanging tokens of mutual esteem (the Minister's gift was a goat) we were escorted to the Central African Republic under armed guard and expelled from the country.
JANE BRYANT

Spain-Portugal, 1990
Driving from Seville to Lisbon, there used to be 5km of "no-man's-land" between the Spanish and Portuguese customs posts. Now that we are all European, there is a modern road and a smart new combined border facility shared by the revenue-men of both nationalities.

On my last journey through by British-registered car, for technical reasons I had to establish my date of arrival in Portugal. Having initially been waved through by the Spanish *funcionario*, I therefore intentionally stopped at his Portuguese twin's sentry-box, only some 10 metres further on, to ask for an entry-stamp in my passport.

Curious to know why I wasn't highlighting it out of there like most other people, the Spaniard left his position to catch up with me and overheard my conversation with his opposite number.

Upon grasping my intent, he placed a firm hand on my shoulder and insisted that I return with him back to Spain, where he carefully and deliberately impressed my passport with a *salida* (exit) stamp, saying: "How can you enter Portugal unless you first leave Spain?" Politically correct and geographically correct.
TERRY EATON

EXPENSIVE BA - DS - not a nice way to begin a column, nor a newspaper advertisement. But that is how the Irish low-cost airline Ryanair has chosen to announce six new routes, accusing British Airways of greed and comparing its lowest fares with BA's.

The advertisements contrast Ryanair's midweek fares with those on BA. As you would expect, the Irish airline chooses the departure days to suit its purpose: travelling out from the UK on a Monday or Tuesday, returning on a Wednesday or Thursday. Those have to be the exact dates; a day earlier or later, and Ryanair's fares go up; if a Saturday intervenes, then BA's prices fall sharply.

You would expect an advertiser to choose the comparisons that suit its purpose. Ryanair also chooses not to mention that its flights depart from Stansted, while BA's leave from Gatwick and Heathrow - much more convenient for millions of travellers.

BA's fares include free meals and drinks, while on Ryanair you have to pay for anything more substantial than water.



SIMON CALDER
You'd imagine that Tirana, 1985, has little in common with Gatwick, 1999

Small considerations, you may think, since flying to Turin, for example, will cost you £119 on Ryanair rather than £462 on BA. The problem is, BA doesn't fly to Turin. Instead, Ryanair quotes BA's fare to Milan, 80 miles away. It happens that BA's low-cost offshoot, Go, flies to Milan, too, with a no-frills service from Stansted. So why doesn't Ryanair use the more valid comparison? Perhaps because Go charges only £100 return.

The fares chart gets stranger still. "Ancona £129," boasts Ryanair, compared with £562 on BA. But BA's only Adriatic

destinations are Venice and Trieste, hundreds of miles away. The closest cities to Ancona to which BA actually flies are Rome and Bologna, each 125 miles distant. Ryanair chooses Bologna - the BA fare there is higher than to Rome. Again, no mention of Go's fare of £100 return from Stansted to Rome or Bologna.

You're probably getting the pattern by now: "Biarritz £99", against £534 on BA. No, British Airways doesn't fly to Biarritz. Ryanair contrasts its fare with BA's to Bordeaux, rather than those to Bilbao - nearer and cheaper.

Oddest of all is Dinard. Ryanair says BA charges £315, compared with its fare of £99. BA, you will not be amazed to learn, does not fly to the Brittany resort. The airline does, though, offer a connection in Jersey to Air Aurigny services, which will get you to Dinard for a maximum fare of £176 return - 45 per cent less than Ryanair claims.

BA, not averse to the odd "dirty trick" itself, has begun legal action: "A writ has been issued claiming trademark infringement and malicious falsehood."

says the airline. Ryanair's new routes are to be welcomed, since they will extend choice and increase competition. But misleading travellers with unfair comparisons, and using offensive advertising, are not so agreeable.

AT TIRANA airport in Albania, the dark days of Communism were just that: unilluminated. Under the old dictator, Enver Hoxha, the runway lights at the capital's airport were switched off after the last (and, indeed, only) flight on Friday, and not switched back on until Olympic Airways' plane turned up from Athens on Tuesday.

You might imagine that Tirana, 1985, has little in common with Gatwick 1999. But Marlene Maguire of Surrey suggests otherwise:

"On boarding CityFlyer flight 675 bound for Menorca, we sat on the Tarmac for two hours, being told there was an electricity failure at the airport and they were unable to pump the fuel. "We have what is one of the busiest international airports in the world, and it has a power cut. No back-up generator? Wonderful."

PRAGUE & BUDAPEST

Convenient flight schedules, the refurbishment of hotels and reasonable tariffs in both Prague and Budapest have made possible the combination of these two beautiful cities on the same itinerary

The city of Prague, built along the banks of the Vltava River and on the surrounding hills, has often been described as the "Hundred Spired Golden Prah", the "Rome of the North". It was the chief city of the old Kingdom of Bohemia and the cultural centre of Europe in the 14th century, enriched by artists and architects from France, Germany, and Italy. Today, Prague still retains its magnificent 18th-century character, the skyline is a fairytale scenario of domes and spires. No less a city of spires is Budapest, one of the gracious cities through which the Danube meanders on its way to the Black Sea. From austere Gothic, stately Renaissance and hardly-restrained Oriental decoration to the exuberance of the Baroque, the ancient towns of Buda and Pest recall the influence of past invaders. Both cities endured nearly 40 years of life behind the former Iron Curtain but have emerged relatively unscathed by the dead hand of dictatorial administration to a new flowering.

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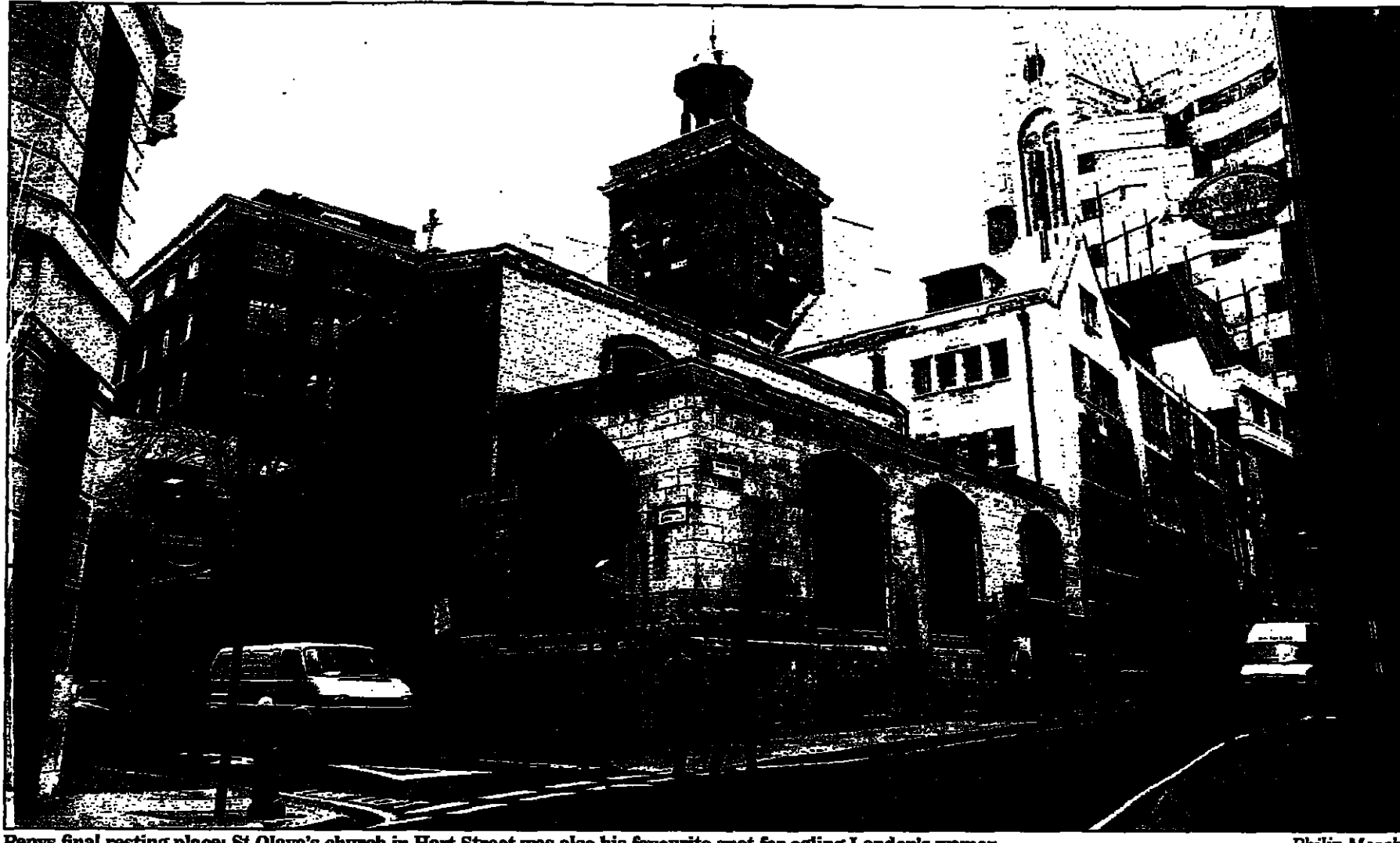
Pepys into the past

Trails of the unexpected: in the footsteps of the diarist around London. By Guy de la Bédoyère

Samuel Pepys's famous diary covers only a fraction of his life, just nine years and five months (1660-69). But thanks to other records a great deal is known about the tailor's son who became secretary of the Admiralty and president of the Royal Society, and it's still possible to walk through his world.

Start at Charing Cross station. Turn left (west) out of the main entrance and walk down Whitehall. As a boy Pepys watched Charles II being executed outside the Banqueting House in Whitehall on 30 January 1649. This magnificent building, designed by Inigo Jones, was the only part ever built of a planned new Whitehall Palace.

The diary opens in 1660 in Axe Yard, near Downing Street, long buried under the sprawl of Whitehall. The church of St Margaret's, still standing beside Westminster Abbey, is where he married his volatile 15-year-old wife, Elizabeth St Michel,



Pepys final resting place: St Olave's church in Hart Street was also his favourite spot for ogling London's women

Philip Meach

where Pepys heard an "able" sermon on 18 August 1667. Despite its worthy context, Pepys filled out the time by trying his luck with a "modest maid". She had her wits about her - and, apparently, a pack of pins with which she threatened the libidinous clerk. So he held another's hand (there's no information about what she thought of that) until the sermon finished and he went off to collect his wife.

At the bottom of Fleet Street is where young master Pepys was born, on 23 February 1633, 366 years ago, the fifth of 11 children of John and Margaret Pepys, in Salisbury Court near the church of St Bride's.

In June 1660, Pepys had been appointed Clerk of the Acts to the Navy in its Seething Lane office. Head up Eastcheap into Great Tower Street. Just after it becomes Byward Street turn left into Seething Lane, which was the new Pepys home.

Here, in 1666, Pepys had another front seat to history. Still wearing his nightgown, he loaded his possessions on to a cart at 4am on 3 September 1666 while the Great Fire of London raged. This area was spared the conflagration, though later fires

and the Blitz saw much of the rest. A small garden marks the site of the Navy Office, which burnt down all on its own in 1673.

Just across Seething Lane is St Olave's, Hart Street, built in about 1450. This was Pepys's "own church", where he ogled women while saying his prayers, and where Elizabeth Pepys is buried.

In 1689 Samuel and Elizabeth took a trip to Europe, partly to restore their marriage after she had found him philandering with her servant Deb. "I was at a wonderful loss," he wrote, after being caught red-handed. Elizabeth became ill while abroad and died soon after their return, on 10 November 1689. Today, the bust of her, commissioned by Pepys, overlooks the altar and the chancel vault where she lies. Her personality streams vividly out of the diary. Pepys cheated on her mercilessly, but he loved her. Their failure to have children, probably due to his operation to remove a kidney stone, was a source of permanent sadness.

St Olave's is a peaceful place to visit on a weekday lunch time. It is huddled in a corner and towered over by faceless blocks, while suits-

and mobile phones scuttle along the pavements outside.

In 1669, Pepys had nearly 20 years of work ahead of him. By 1673 he was secretary of the Admiralty and MP for Castle Rising. He had enemies, though, and he was implicated in a scandal involving the leasing of a naval vessel. He was imprisoned nearby in the Tower of London in 1679. Pepys's loyalty to James II made him a target and suspect Catholic sympathiser when William and Mary arrived in 1688, ending his career. He served two further terms in the Tower, in 1689 and 1690. During some of this time he lived in York Buildings, Buckingham Street, built in 1675 on the site of old York House.

Head back to Charing Cross station (or Embankment Tube station) and just beside it you'll see Villiers Street, which runs between the two stations. The street name honours George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who lived in York House; his conceit was to have successive streets on the site re-named to commemorate his full title, even down to Of Alley (now York Place).

Walk down Villiers Street to Victoria Embankment Gardens and the-

left. The park was created when the Embankment was built in the 19th century, and pushed the Thames back. All the way along, watergates once led down to the river, where crowds of boatmen waited for fares up, down and across the river.

York Watergate, built in 1626, was where Pepys's esteemed friends such as John Evelyn, the other great 17th-century diarist, and Dr Thomas Gale, master of St Paul's School, arrived. They were on their way to partake in one of Mr Pepys's musical evenings or "philosophical suppers".

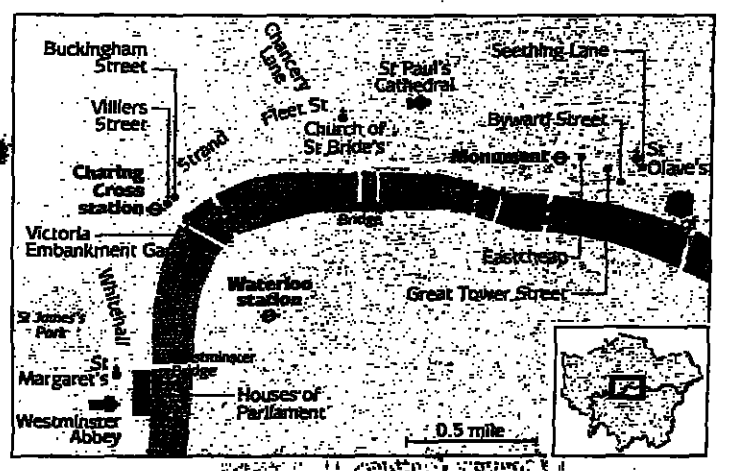
The pair were interested in everything and anything, and if they weren't at Pepys's listening to a celebrated emu sing, they were at the Royal Society watching various tuncatic demonstrations. One occasion, on 14 November 1666, involved connecting the blood system of one dog to that of another. The first dog died and the second survived, reported Pepys, and was "likely to do well" (fortunately, it did).

Pepys lived at both 12 and 14 Buckingham Street at various times, and a blue plaque commemorates his residence. From here, he could

easily escape for half an hour's print-buying in Covent Garden across the Strand. Look through the Watergate and imagine the river, the boats, the bustle and, unavoidably, the stink.

Pepys dwindled into his twilight years, with his companion Mary Skinner, moving to the home of his former clerk, Will Hewer, in Clapham. Here, he and Evelyn exchanged letters discussing remedies for incontinence instead of professional business.

And here, also, Pepys, "universally beloved... a very great Cherisher of Learned men" (as Evelyn recalled) died at 3.45am on 26 May 1703. A few days later he was buried in St Olave's in the heart of the city he loved. He lies there still.



Map showing Pepys's route through London, from Whitehall to Victoria Embankment Gardens.

SOMETHING TO DECLARE

NEWS FROM THE TRAVEL WORLD

Bargain of the week
Glasgow by rail for £15 return. Scotland's largest city is the place to be this winter. Yesterday Frank Lloyd Wright and the Living City, the first big exhibition of the City of Architecture and Design 1999, opened at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery (0141-287 2700, 10am-5pm Monday to Saturday, 11am-5pm Sunday, free). And last weekend the relics of St Valentine were enshrined in their new resting place in Greyfriars Centre at 270 Ballater Street, on the Commercial Road in the Gorbals (0141-428 0740; the "hold music" for this line, incidentally, is 'Love Me Tender').

If you shop at the right supermarket, you can travel from many UK stations - including Birmingham, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol, Liverpool, London Euston and Manchester - to Scotland's largest city for just £15 return. Holders of the Tesco Clubcard can go from any Tesco store) free to Glasgow or to anywhere on Virgin's network on the West Coast main line or Cross Country services for this flat fare, until 21 March. Call 0845 305 0100 at least three working days before you wish to travel.



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True or false?
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To reach anywhere else in the Republic, the flat fare is £19.99 one way/£26.50 return.

Trouble spots
Latest travel advice for Turkey from the Foreign Office (0171-238 4503)

"Most visitors enjoy trouble-free visits to Turkey. However, take sensible precautions and be aware of the dangers of visiting certain areas of Turkey."

"There continues to be widespread terrorist activity in parts of south-east Turkey including the kidnapping of western tourists. Travel to this area should be avoided. There have also been terrorist attacks in coastal resorts, the Black Sea provinces and inland towns. The authorities give a high priority to protecting visitors but security cannot be guaranteed."

"British citizens visiting Turkey are advised to only stay at hotels and guest houses that have been approved by the Ministry of Tourism. Ministry approved hotels and guest houses are available from £12 up per night."

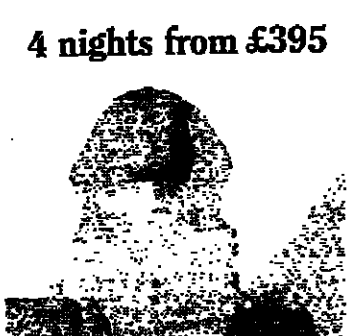
"Street robbery is on the increase in the major Istanbul tourist areas. Be wary of approaches by strangers. There have been instances of tourists being offered drink and food which is drugged."

SIMON CALDER

A FEW DAYS AT THE PYRAMIDS

A Long Weekend at the famous Mena House Hotel at Giza

There are a few hotel locations in the world that can boast the Pyramids and the Sphinx. The Mena House has played host to many of the most important personages of the last century including members of the royal families of Europe, politicians such as Churchill, stars from Hollywood, besides being the headquarters for Allied Command during the last war. The hotel accommodation is laid out in a circle and in the middle are beautiful grounds with a swimming pool and palm trees, where you can be sitting and believing for all the world that you are in an oasis and that you have the Pyramids all to yourself.



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Where the world awoke

Conquered by many and adored by all, Syria's mighty beauty reflects its war-torn past. By Adrian Hamilton

It may not have been the precise spot where Alexander crossed the Tigris before sweeping down to the final defeat of the Persian emperor Darius. The river has changed course too often to know. But Ain Dwar, at the northern tip of Syria, was right on the Turkish border, at an ancient crossing site with the single arch of a long-destroyed bridge.

Alexander broke the flow of the river by standing his cavalry in lines in the water while his infantry waded through with their weapons and baggage held high. We didn't try to get across. The Tigris at this point forms the border with a Turkey bristling with more gun emplacements than the Maginot Line and an army that tends to take pot-shots at anyone straying across the river. Only the intervention of our host of the previous evening, the Armenian bishop of Qamishli, and a call between generals on the two sides, ensured that we could go down from the leahouse that looks over the river and examine the arch to the bemusement of the Kurdish girls working the bank.

His Grace was no ordinary bishop. I should add: a worldly prelate in his purple-lined robes, and a passionate one. Speeding about in the largest Mercedes ("a gift from the President"), he has bent himself both to community centres and the erection of monuments to the Armenian massacres of 1915-22 (his father had been sold into an Arab family as a small child, the rest of his family were wiped out).

Recommended to us as a power in the land and a gourmet to boot, he proved to be both. We stayed overnight in his convent (fresh "buffalo butter" with apricot jam for breakfast) and ate, at his youth centre in Qamishli, a dinner the like of which I have barely experienced. The tradition of Armenian cooking (and it is a great tradition) is alive and well and can be tasted in Qamishli.

It's not the only thing alive and well in Syria. For bad reasons as much as good, 30 years of Alouite rule has preserved a stability of minorities that has quite simply been wiped out by war and the tyranny of majorities elsewhere in the Levant. Relative isolation has also preserved from development and destruction an amazing array of monuments.

The Tigris itself sweeps on into Iraq soon after entering Syria, the "King's Way" of Darius and Xerxes now taking caravans of articulated Turkish trucks to Baghdad with



food and supplies and returning – it is said – with half the antiquities of Baghdad. But the Euphrates continues south-east through north-eastern Syria, with the area known as *al-geira*, "the land between rivers", to the right and the Syrian desert on its left. Here is truly the cradle of civilisation, even more than the Mesopotamia of Iraq, where wild wheat and barley grew and inspired the first domestication of plant and animal.

Thirty miles to the south of Qamishli is Tell Brak, where Max Mallowan dug while his wife, Agatha Christie, wrote. The Americans are there now, and if there is not much to see of their digging, the sheer size of the place and its walls and gates gives reality to what was once the centre of one of the world's earliest empires.

There are literally hundreds of "tells", or mounds, dotting the plains along the Euphrates and, across the deserts towards Homs and Hama, nearly all of them are signals of ancient towns. The great majority are still to be excavated. The itch to see what's in them, the sense of a 5,000-year past that has still to reveal so much, is overwhelming. Those that have been dug have yielded great archives of trade and personal life (you can read them with translations in the museums at Deir ez-Zor and Damascus, with their talk of health advice, the makings of a good dancer and the apologies of a governor accused of sending secondary mushrooms to his king).

At Ebla, home of the most productive of all ancient archives, you can still see the temple and the library. Down south, near the Iraqi border, you can visit Mari, vast in extent, and with its massive halls protected in part by a modern roof (you need a good map to sort out where you are and at what age). With the damming of the Euphrates and the creation of Lake Assad, a good deal of rescue archaeology has been done, its fruits on display not just in Aleppo

and Damascus, but also at the local museum at Deir ez-Zor, where the Germans have financed a first-class display of artefact and explanation.

Deir ez-Zor, on the left bank (because of the oil and gas fields nearby), and a jolly market with several charming cafés and kebabs restaurants along the banks of the river. It makes a good half-way point for a visit. For the Euphrates is best taken as an arc, starting with Aleppo and its great bazaar and striking out across the desert from the city to catch it at the Arab castle of Qala'at Najm, turning down the river to Mari and then across the desert to Palmyra, Queen of the Desert and the finest desert ruin in the whole of the Middle East.



Known as Queen of the desert, Palmyra is probably the finest desert ruin in the whole of the Middle East

Corbis

Most people go to Syria for its castles and Graeco-Roman cities of the west. But it is the east which explains the country – the frontier where the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Persian and Arab empires clashed and compromised over the land trade from China to the Mediterranean. The Seleucids, successors of Alexander, built the great fortress town of Dura Europos; you can do a quick tour on a motorbike driven by a very large Syrian with an even larger rifle strapped to his back. The Byzantines built Halabiyeh and Rasafah, with two basilicas and underground storage caverns bigger than a cathedral. The Arabs have the magical forts of Qala'at ar-Rabha and Qala'at Ja'abar, a marvel of brick courses on a spit of land now surrounded by lake.

It is called the Syrian desert, but it is the desert of the Bible, stony with scrub and full of donkeys. The nomads still move from winter to summer pasture, with flocks of red-brown goats mixed with sheep. In the villages of the north, the houses are beehive shapes of mud, bright red against the sun, the same flash of intense colour that brightens the local dress.

Syria, still under-exploited as a tourist destination but increasingly open to visitors, is not a land of romance. It is a country of the frontiers of history, between desert and pasture, mountain and plain, between East and West, settlement and nomad. Nowhere else can you feel so completely the beginnings and the frontiers of Western civilisation.

FACT FILE

Getting there
Between them, Syrian Arab Airways (0171-493 2851) and British Mediterranean Airways (through BA, 0345 222111) fly from Heathrow to Damascus seven times a week. Adrian Hamilton used Air Miles to book a return flight from London to Damascus on British Mediterranean Airways. A World Offer return fare of £349 is available for travel between now and 19 March; it must include a Saturday-night stay.

Red tape
Visitors need a visa, which can be obtained in advance from the Syrian Embassy, 8 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PH (0891 600171). Visas are refused to travellers whose passports show evidence of a visit to Israel.
More information
There is no Syrian tourist office in the UK. But if you send a stamped, addressed envelope to the Syrian Embassy (see above), you will receive a selection of brochures.

THE INDEPENDENT

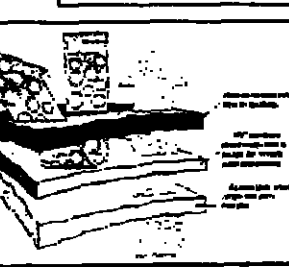
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THE SHOPPING FORECAST

FANS OF Monet's paintings need not queue to see his floral landscapes at the Royal Academy but can simply pick up a phone and book themselves an autumn break in Spain to see the *celaminas*.

These are the "saffron gardens" where thousands of *Satureia hispanica*, or purple-coloured crocuses, bloom. Their dried red-coloured stigmas are harvested each autumn to produce saffron, probably the most expensive and precious spice you can buy, and used to stain and scent all manner of products, from cloth to cuisine, in brilliant shades of gold.

Native to the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Middle East, saffron is now produced in many parts of the world, including the single producer in Wales that supplies Fortnum & Mason. The major share of the market, though, is served by the violet-hued crocus fields of Castilla La Mancha in Spain, an area which produces up to 40 tonnes a year from individual family plots.

Saffron production here extends right from Albacete in the

east to Toledo in the west and from Cuenca in the north to the wine-lover's favourite, Valdepeñas, in the south. Castilla La Mancha is under-valued by many Spanish guide books (the Lonely Planet guide to Spain describes the region as having "some of Spain's least attractive country") yet there is plenty for spice-lovers and holiday-makers to keep them entertained, even when the surrounding fields are not in bloom.

One charming place to stay at in La Mancha is the town of Almagro, home to one of the most enchanting parades in Spain (a converted monastery) and, in the Flemish-influenced Plaza Mayor, home to the Corral de Comedias, a 17th-century wooden theatre. If you visit the town during July you can catch a performance, as this is when the theatre stages the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico.

But, if you're more interested in saffron, wait until the last weekend in October and carry on a little further north, to Consuegra. A higgledy-piggledy village, with a castle to call its own and a Don Quixote-esque ring of restored windmills around it, the village

is the site of the annual Fiesta de la Rosa del Azafrán, when the local saffron season is celebrated in quintessential Spanish style – loud guitars, stamping feet, castanets, lots of lace and, of course, hundreds of crocuses. The truly dedicated can stay on and satiate their passion for saffron with a steaming plateful of paella before retiring for the evening. A loose Spanish equivalent of bangers and mash, paella is a combination of two Moorish legacies – rice and, appropriately, saffron.

If you're just mad about saffron and can't wait until October, though, stay at home in Saffron Walden, the exotically named Essex town where saffron was first cultivated in Britain back in the 14th century. Pick up your copy of the *Diverterment* catalogue (0181-246 4300 for mail order).

A 4g pack of Saffron Spanish saffron costs £7.95, about twice the price you would pay in La Mancha. A cheap flight to Madrid and the bus to Almagro will set you back around £120, meaning that you could start showing a modest profit if you came back with just a quarter-pound of the precious stigmas.

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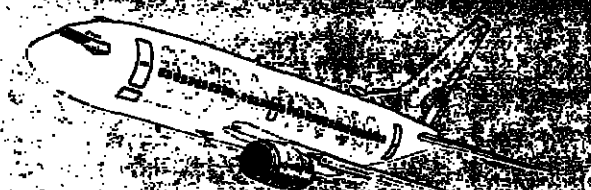
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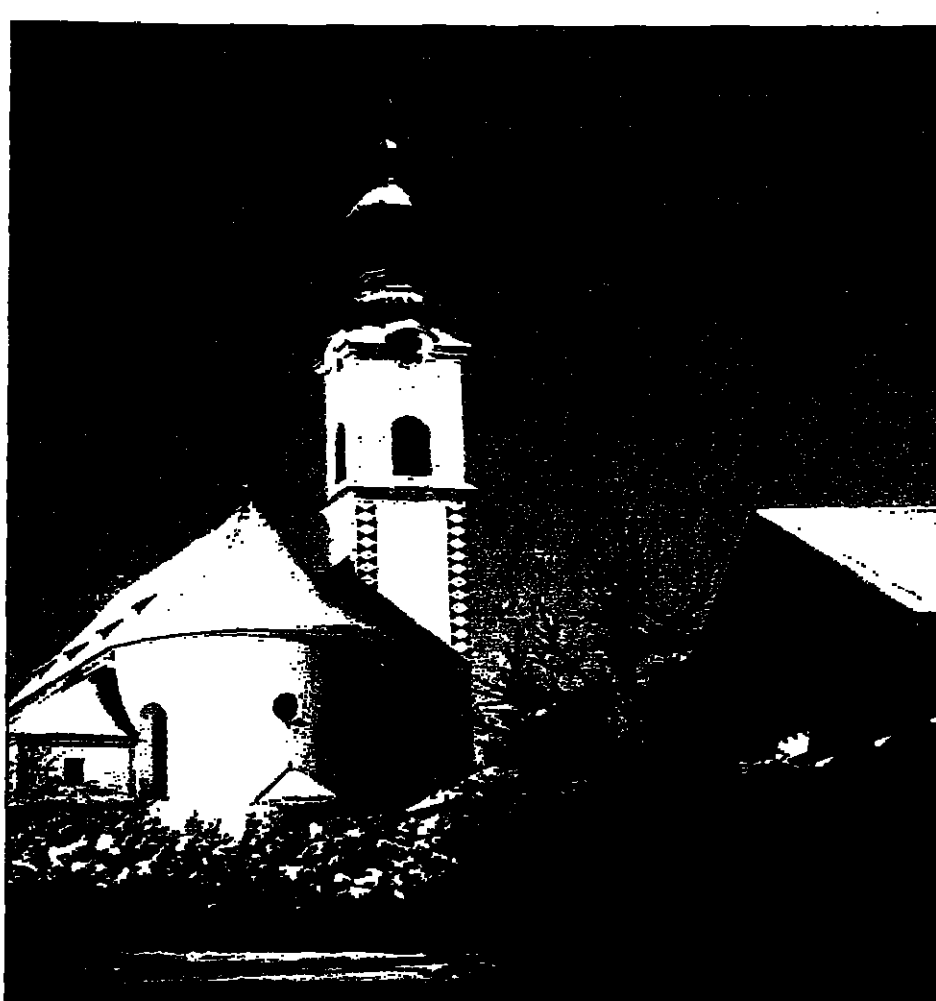
Time to confess: sometimes skiing up and down a single mountain can be a bit of a bore. That's why large linked areas are so appealing. By Stephen Wood

There are times when skiing can seem a curiously pointless activity. Sisyphus wouldn't have understood it; the mythical king of Corinth, condemned for his misdeeds endlessly to push a stone up a hill (as you'll remember, it always slipped from his grasp at the top and rolled back down again), would probably be intrigued by what skiers had done to deserve their similar fate. On a morning with bright sunshine, beautiful soft snow and fine views, the question doesn't arise; but on other occasions you sometimes wonder, after a few runs, just what's so great about going up and down a mountain.

At those times, the answer is to ski to a different mountain - to get off the treadmill and really go somewhere. Hence my pleasure at being in the Portes du Soleil area soon after Christmas; disaffected with Avoriaz, I could just ski down the hill, cross the road in Morzine to get on to its slopes, and then drop into the next resort, Les Gets. In the other direction, across the Chavanette ridge, I could have skied into Switzerland.

I am not alone, of course, in being attracted to large, linked ski areas encompassing several mountains; size isn't everything but, for most skiers, the bigger the ski area, the better. Proof comes this season from Schlading in Austria.

In last season's edition of the *Good Skiing Guide*, its report on Schlading warned that the resort's surrounding ski slopes "sound pretty impressive until you appreciate that the skiing takes place in 18 areas on half-a-dozen mountains... only two linked by lift". But this season, new lift connections on either side of the resort mean that the Planai and Hochwurzen peaks are now linked with two others in the Dachstein-Tauern area,



Good connections give you access to new slopes and new sights. *Slidshoot Offshoot*

the Reiteralm and Hauser Kibling, giving access to a total of 115km of skiing on 51 pistes, and 50 lifts. The effect of opening these new links was immediate: in the first few weeks of the season, the area's lift-pass revenue increased by more than a third, and sales of accommodation were up by 10 per cent.

Local knowledge is one reason why skiers were so quick to respond to the greater convenience of the four linked mountains on the south side of the Enns valley. Almost half of

Schlading's visitors are Austrian, making it one of the country's most popular resorts among its nationals. Britons lag far behind, providing just 5 per cent of the resort's business: among the big operators, only Crystal and Neilson go there. That will surely change; create a big ski area and the British will come, particularly to a resort that is only an hour's drive from Salzburg airport.

Although there are blue runs on the Planai, and a handful of blacks - including the steep run

down to the cable-car base used for Schlading's annual World Cup downhill race - the skiing in the Dachstein-Tauern is predominantly suited to intermediates. There are 17 red runs in the Planai/Hochwurzen area alone, most of them fast, sweeping pistes that drop through the trees; only on the upper slopes, at about 1,850m, are the ski areas wide open. The linked mountains stretch for about 15km along the valley, and for intermediates there is an enjoyable day's worth of

good red runs just to get from one end to the other - a day's skiing, that is, because even on a busy weekend in January the lift queues were short.

Despite the relatively low altitude of the resort - and the fact that I was there in early January, before this season's major snowfalls - the conditions were remarkable, too. Partly this is because the Dachstein-Tauern is well-armed with snow cannons, partly because the slopes' north-facing aspect keeps the surface consistent. But the area also has a well-earned reputation for piste-grooming.

The resort's rarer pleasures include the old chairlift which, down at valley level, connects the Planai and Hochwurzen mountains. I can't remember ever going through a tunnel on a chairlift before, and certainly not one with a *Flintstones* theme. At the tunnel's entrance Fred Flintstone offers a cheery "Yabba dabba doo" (rough translation: *herzlich willkommen*); inside, amusing tableaux from *Flintstone* family life are hung from the cave-like walls.

In the village, the illustrations hanging from the walls of the back room in Chary Kahr's bar also have a single theme: Arnold Schwarzenegger, photographed on a film set, with his Humvee off-road vehicle, on skis, etc.

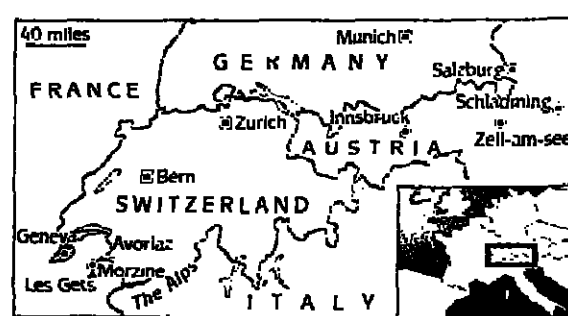
Herr Kahr runs a ski school in Schlading, and among his past trainees are the British women's skiing team - and Schwarzenegger, born locally, who is a regular visitor to the resort and a good friend of Kahr's. I asked whether the actor was a good skier. "Yes," said Kahr, but without a great deal of conviction. Oddly encouraging that, isn't it?

A ski-pass for the Dachstein-Tauern area costs ASch 375 (£20) per day, ASch 1,795 (£94) for six days. Austrian National Tourist Office: 0171-629 0461

RESORT REPORT: ZELL AM SEE, AUSTRIA

ZELL "ON-THE-WATER" is a chocolate-box version of a lakeside village, as appealing under a thick covering of snow as it is in summer, when the flowers are out and the steamers chug back and forth across the lake. Traffic, which once raced through the centre, has been diverted through a tunnel, restoring some of the original medieval calm.

There are several ways to get to the slopes - some, as it turned out, quicker than others. The route I chose was by the Zeller Bergbahn from the centre of the village. This was a mistake on two fronts. Although the queues in many resorts are worse on Sundays, a half-hour wait seemed excessive. And more careful study of the piste map would have revealed that this particular gondola doesn't go all



the way: from the Mittelsstation, where its passengers are emptied out, the journey to the top still involves a couple of chair lifts and a drag lift. A quicker route is to take the shuttle bus from outside the Bergbahn station to the ski school; from there the Schmitthöhebahn cable car goes straight up the mountain. Not only do the queues tend to be shorter, but it deposits you as high as you can go, 2,000 metres above the lake.

From here, even a relatively inexperienced skier can ski right down to the village. In Zell, as in much of Austria, the skiing is best suited to intermediates. To extend the network of red and blue runs, Zell is linked with Kaprun, by bus; the same lift ticket can be used in both resorts. Two hours from Munich - to which I flew for £80 return - Zell is well-placed for a late break. CATHY PACKE

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Resort	Area open	Comment	Slopes (m) Lvr	Upr	1st snow	Temp	Forecast
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Pas de la Casa	100%	Great conditions	95	115	11 02	-5C	Bright
AUSTRIA							
Aufbach	100%	Amazing powder	110	220	18 07	-4C	Unsettled
Bad Gastein	98%	Packed & powder	80	160	16 02	-5C	Unsettled
CANADA							
Whistler	100%	Deep powder	180	365	16 02	-2C	Flurries
FRANCE							
Meribel	97%	Fresh snow	115	255	19 02	-1C	Light snow
Plaine	90%	Plenty of powder	200	500	19 02	-5C	Variable
ITALY							
Corbina	95%	All 4 sectors open	30	70	09 02	-5C	Changeable
SCOTLAND							
Calmar	80%	Upper runs usable	45	70	17 02	2C	Windy
SWEDEN							
Salen	80%	Colder	60	80	10 02	-10C	Cloudy
SWITZERLAND							
Waters	40%	Lots of powder	140	260	18 02	-8C	Snow
UNITED STATES							
Crested Butte	90%	Packed powder	105	125	15 02	-16C	Prty cdy

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Did Don Juan really once lurk in the shadows of the Barrio Santa Cruz's narrow streets? Or did Carmen ever admire its geranium-covered balconies?

James Davis Travel Photography

The city where the barber still sings

When you stroll in the alleyways of Seville, don't be surprised if you bump into Figaro on the way to his wedding. By Alex Ninian

I spoke to a Spanish friend in England about the castle or town of Aguas Frescas, just outside Seville. He said, "I know of it, but have never been there." I asked the taxi driver in Seville. He said, "It is some way away and this is a town-only taxi, so I never go there". Another thought Aguas Frescas was a cocktail bar, and a waiter thought it was a substitute for Perrier water. In fact, the castle and the town have never existed. They were Beaumarchais' entirely imaginary setting for his play, *The Barber of Seville*.

Seville is like that. It exists as much in fiction as it does in fact. Here in the Santa Cruz district, Don Juan lurked in the shadows of its narrow streets. Here, the marriage of Figaro took place and the Gypsy Carmen, from just across the river, loved the bullfighter and seduced the soldier, and no one is quite sure how much these romantic scenes have a connection with reality, or how much they are pure myth and illusion.

The Santa Cruz quarter is the heart of the old town. The white-

walled houses and shops have balconies smothered with bougainvillea and hibiscus in narrow alleyways. The short, jumbled streets have their names picked out in blue and white tiles. Yet, arranged into a one-way system, cars contentedly wind their way through.

Old trees shade cobbled squares with miniature marble fountains. One is a real square named after the fictitious Donna Elvira, where nowadays people gather to play guitars. To us, Seville is mysterious and exotic, yet frighteningly familiar. It triggers a thousand images of half-remembered posters, stage scenery, advertisements, operas, movies.

Matuel sat at my table at breakfast. He was visiting from the north and was as captivated by the place as I was. I said: "To me it is a town of myth and legend, a kind of Spanish Brigadoon." He said, in perfect English: "I think the marvel is the way the old place takes modern things and massages them into its own shape." It's true: bar-coded goods in air-conditioned shops are bought without any culture shock by widows dressed in black, carrying silk fans.

It is big enough to have a life of its own without visitors, but if they do come, it absorbs them into its ways. It prints maps that tell you which streets are shady in the morning and which in the afternoon, so that you can walk like the locals. A host of places will ensure that you enjoy dozens of sherries and wines (from vineyards that have been there since the Romans), *gaspacho* and spicy *albondigas*. The more heroic can try *sopa de pececillo* (ham and egg soup) or *cazuela de robo* (bull's tail in red wine sauce).

As we walked up to the El Arenal district, a few yards west of Santa Cruz, the ring road skirted the bullring, as if the road had been designed to take the aficionados to the bullfight. And the statue of the fictional Carmen stood across the road, looking through the main gate and into the arena. In the nearby prison, the imaginary Fiedlo is said to have languished, and the real Cervantes wrote the unreal *Don Quixote*.

A few hundred yards across the Guadalquivir river is the *barrio* (or district) of Triana. Once, thousands of Gypsies lived in its claustrophobic maze. Its still-narrow streets



retain some of the old *corrales* or courtyards, bright yellow and orange walls surrounding tiled paving crowded with potted flowers. Matuel pointed out that it is now a normally functioning commercial part of town. I found it easy to imagine the close-packed warren 150 years ago as a no-go area for the authorities, where a deserter like Don José could disappear.

Back across the river and a little north, the Alcazar and the cathedral tell an older story of the town's fabulous past, from the emperor Hadrian, who was born here,

through half a millennium of Moorish rule to the Catholic present. When the Christians reconquered the area 700 years ago, they thoughtfully left standing the minaret from which the Muslim faithful had previously been called to prayer. The result is a deeply Catholic city dominated by a Muslim minaret (the Giralda).

Seville uses the afternoon to impose its own style on any possible modern tendencies: everything closes. After 1pm, nothing happens, and every day it happens again. It is a time of heat and quiet. "Until when?" you ask. "Until after four." "How much after four?" A shrug. "Until some time after four."

"You have to see the cathedral," insisted Matuel when I emerged from my siesta. "It's the biggest in the world." "Really? What about St Peter's, in Rome?" "No, they can prove it, you'll see," he persevered.

It certainly had an extravagance of private chapels. Each one - and I counted roughly 56 - was a spectacle of marble, gold and silver; but among the statues of the Virgin Mary there was *The Guinness Book of Records*. It was in a display cabinet

with gilt framing, and it lay open at the page which declared it to be the biggest cathedral in the world. Perhaps there should be another entry claiming it to be the only cathedral in the world to display *The Guinness Book of Records*.

Next to the cathedral stands the Alcazar, which has been the fortress and palace of the rulers of Seville since Roman times. It is of a size able to house the 800 wives of an early Moorish sultan, who decorated the balconies with flowers planted in the skulls of his decapitated enemies. The Spanish king, Pedro the Cruel, continued its bizarre history by rebuilding it and murdering a guest to steal his ruby, which he gave as a present to the Black Prince of England. The stone has now been shown not to be a ruby at all but a spinel, a lesser gem, but it remains in the British crown.

Many and diverse are the visits you can make outside town. Spain now has a "TGV" from Seville to Madrid, and you can use it to get to Cordoba in 45 minutes. Granada and its Alhambra are also within reach. Back in Seville, walking along Calle San Fernando, we see the

words *Fabrica de Tabacos* chiselled into the stone at the main entrance of a vast, low building, ornate with carved stone. It was once the largest building in Spain and was the tobacco factory where the fabled Carmen worked along with 10,000 other *cigarreros*. It is now the university, and again the new order has taken over smoothly from the old.

Students stroll where once Gypsies worked "with daggers in their garters and carnations in their hair". - Aguas Frescas? Don Giovanni? Figaro? Carmen? Did they ever really exist in Seville? I don't think it really matters, and the Sevillanos don't really care.

Alex Ninian paid £750 for a tailor-made package from Mundi Color, booked through Travelmania, 125 Holloway Road, London N7 8LT (0171-700 4844). It included flights from Heathrow to Seville and from Malaga, 10 days' car rental, and stays at the five-star Hotel Tryp Colon in Seville and the four-star Parador del Nerja. For more information, contact the Spanish Tourist Office, 22 Manchester Square, London W1M 5AP (0171-486 8077).

Andalusia without advice: a tale of two travel writers

A remote cottage with a swimming pool, high up in the hills of Andalusia, sounded an ideal escape from the word processor. Then reality set in. By Emily Hatchwell

FRED WRITES travel articles for a living: I edit guidebooks. You might have thought that, between us, we could arrange a trouble-free self-catering holiday in southern Spain. If only. We arrived at Gatwick far too late to find the off-site car park we'd booked and ended up paying a fortune in the on-site NCP car park.

At Malaga airport, we couldn't locate the car-hire office. Nor the tour operator rep for directions to our cottage. Had I forgotten to tell the company what flight we were on? Tears and recriminations followed. Eventually, both car hire office and rep materialised. We drove into the night and the mountains behind the Costa del Sol.

Our destination was Finca Paquita, a small complex of cottages that shared a swimming pool below the remote hilltop *pueblo blanco* (white town) of Zahara de la Sierra. This had seemed an ideal rural retreat. It sounded basic, but was cheap and, in the words of the brochure, "the only sounds audible in the pure mountain air are the gushing waters of the stream and the bird chatter in apple trees". It was the early hours

of the morning when, after driving down several dirt tracks in pitch darkness, we arrived at the *finca*.

In the darkness, we couldn't make out much of our immediate surroundings. In the morning, we raised the kitchen blind excitedly to reveal piles of sand and rubble, a cement mixer and workmen building a path just feet from the cottage's terrace. The pool was empty, and instead of the "lovely recliners" we'd been promised, it was surrounded by knee-high grass and weeds.

The situation was a red rag to Fred, who likes to think his middle names are Consumer Champion. He phoned the company and asked if it would be possible to move. That evening, we received a visit from Penny, the rep. She was fairly apologetic about the work (apparently, it had been delayed by rain). And yes, they did have a free property we could move to - nothing less than a three-bedroom villa in seven acres of grounds with a private pool. It took us about 10 seconds to decide to take our free upgrade.

Once we'd found La Huerta, the villa surpassed our expectations.

Though only a few miles inland from the Costa del Sol, it looked up towards the whitewashed cubes of the *pueblo blanco* of Casares. The meadows above it were yellow and pink carpets: I counted 20 types of wild flower in a single square yard.

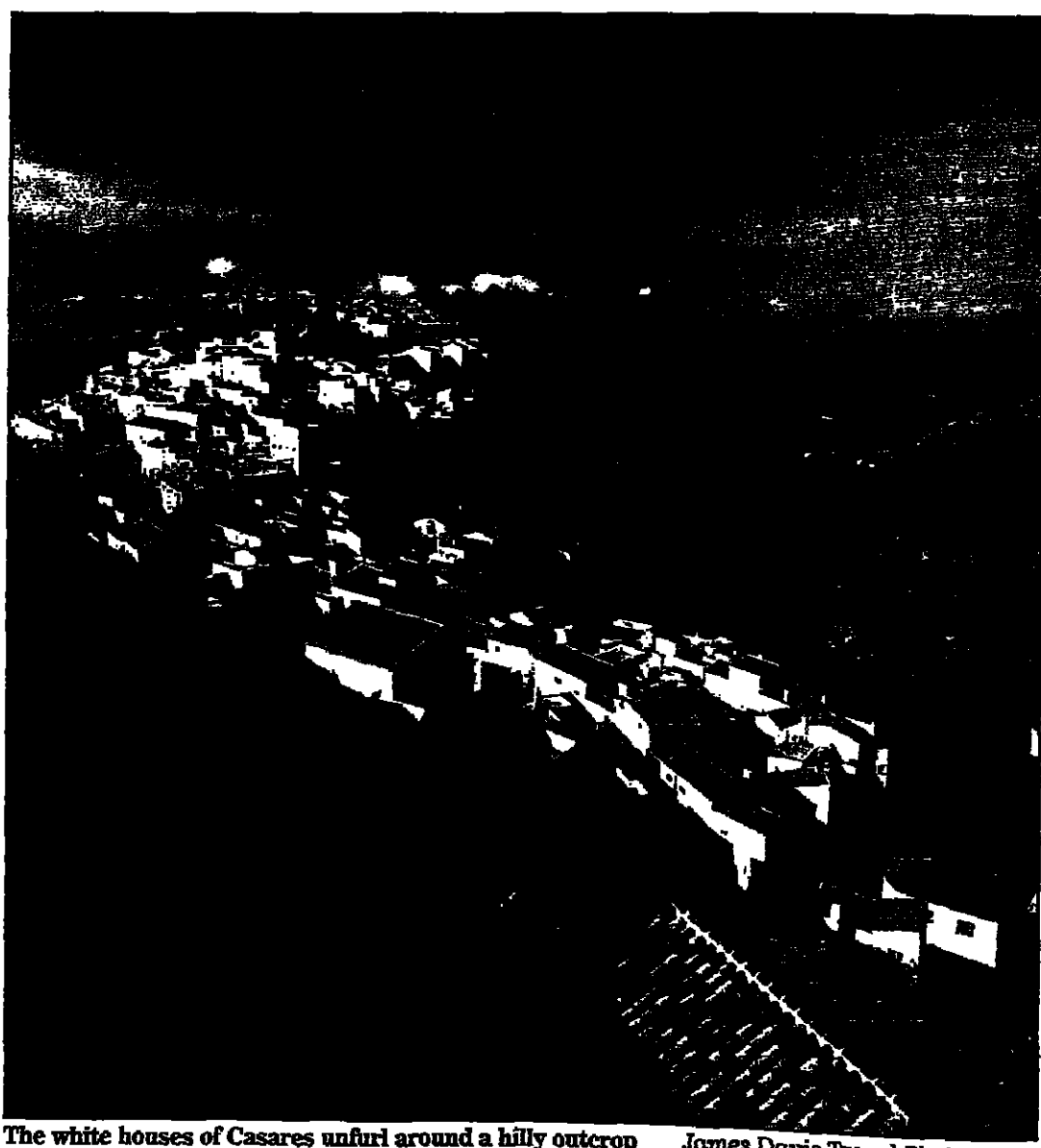
The owners, Brian and Barbara, lived (in considerably less comfort) at the bottom of the garden. We didn't see much of them, but made friends with their menagerie of animals which included Ruth the donkey, whose whinnying served as our early morning call. Everything was blissful - except the weather. We hadn't bothered to read the "When to go" sections in our guidebooks. In our early May week, sometimes the skies were overcast; the rest of the time it bucketed down.

We were soon forced into sightseeing. We covered hundreds of miles of wiggly mountain roads, dodging thunder and lightning one day, in search of the perfect *pueblo blanco*. Fred began to fill notebooks, and we passed the time competing for the best similes and metaphors. Evenings were too chilly to stay at home, but we found it surprisingly

difficult to find appealing places to eat in and around Casares. Our only success was an hour's drive up in the mountains, a romantic restaurant in the hamlet of Benalauria, where we dined well on local produce. Since the weather was lousy and we pined for more good food, we decided to forgo our last night at La Huerta and head up to Seville.

Of course, hours before we left, the skies cleared and our pool actually looked inviting. It was in fact freezing, but we enjoyed drying off in the sun. Our arrival in Seville was embarrassing. Having circled the car-free alleys of the old quarter vainly trying to reach our hotel, I had to walk to it and ask the porter to come and park the car for us.

The city was heaven - a gastronomic idyll after our culinary wilderness. We spent our last two days testing its reputation as world capital of the tapas bar, discussing future holiday options over glasses of *fino*. A backpacking trip visiting one of my brothers in Madagascar had been long on the agenda but, by now, house-sitting for another brother in Sheffield seemed more appropriate.



The white houses of Casares unfurl around a hilly outcrop

James Davis Travel Photography



48 hours ... in Basel

You need a break – and a shortcut to the soul of a great city. The Fasnacht, Basel's annual carnival, begins on Monday but, as Margaret Campbell discovers, the city is also the perfect destination for a winter weekend

Why go now?

Because the Basel's lively annual carnival, begins at 4am on Monday with a masked lantern-lit procession through the city, while the weather might not match Rio's, it's still worth seeing. The two main parades are on Monday and Wednesday afternoon: the local community has been in party mood for weeks, decorating floats and preparing costumes. Even if you're not here for carnival-time, you can enjoy a roomful of Monet canvases at the Kunstmuseum (without braving the Royal Academy's crowds). And there's plenty more to explore in this city of museums, statues and fountains which has Europe's best free city-transport deal.



Basel's lively annual carnival begins with a masked procession



Dickens and Napoleon both stayed at the Drei Könige hotel

Check in

As in the rest of Switzerland, accommodation doesn't come cheap. I was directed by the tourist office to a hotel at the "cheaper" end of the price scale, and paid Sfr170 (£70) for a double room in the excellent two-star Hotel Rochat, (Petersgraben 23, 00 41 61 261 81 40) which would probably be classed as a three-star elsewhere in Europe. Should you decide to indulge, stay at the Drei Könige (Blumenrain 8, 00 41 61 261 52 52), which once welcomed Dickens and Napoleon. Prices start at Sfr275 (£115) for a single room. The city's web page on <http://www.basel-tourismus.ch> provides a full list of accommodation.

Take a hike

A leaflet outlining five walking tours is available from the tourist office, but the DIY approach is just as satisfying: start at the Spalentor, a 13th-century remnant of the former city walls, cross Petersplatz (stopping to examine the small Saturday-morning flea market), before continuing down Spalenberg to Marktplatz. Spend a few minutes examining the facade and frescoed courtyard of the red sandstone Rathaus (Town Hall), before heading for the Mittere Bridge and crossing the Rhine. Once on the other side, turn right and follow the river until you come to the "Leu", a small passenger ferry that will take you across to Münsterplatz for Sfr1.20 (50p). From there, it's an easy walk downhill, back to the town centre.

Demure dinner

The streets behind Marktplatz are full of restaurants, including the vegetarian Zum roten Engel (1) in Andreasplatz (00 41 61 261 2008). Head back up towards the university area and try the Restauration zur Harmonie (2) (Petersgraben 71, 00 44 61 261 07 18): tasty food (if a trifle heavy), friendly staff, and a relaxed atmosphere. It's easy to see why it's popular with locals. Main courses such as veal in mushroom and cream sauce (Geschneitztes) or prawns, cooked in butter and garlic (Riesengrütten) cost around Sfr30 (£13).

Window shopping

Freie Strasse, Basel's main shopping street, begins at the other end of St Alban-Graben from the art gallery and runs down to Marktplatz. If you still have any energy (or cash) by the time you reach there, the steep streets leading back up Andreasplatz are lined with boutiques selling hats, music and ethnic goods.

The icing on the cake

If you like a zoo, don't miss Basel's (Blinningerstrasse 41, tram 8). Entry is Sfr12, and is worth it just for the aquarium: tank after tank of amazingly coloured fish, turtles and other sea-life. Or head back to Barrässelplatz and the Historical Museum (3). The permanent collection includes medieval goldwork, a collection of musical instruments and 15th-century tapestries, and this Sunday is the last day of a major exhibition marking the 350th anniversary of the treaty of Westphalia, which recognised the Swiss Confederation (and ended the Thirty Years War). Entry costs Sfr5.

Lunch on the run

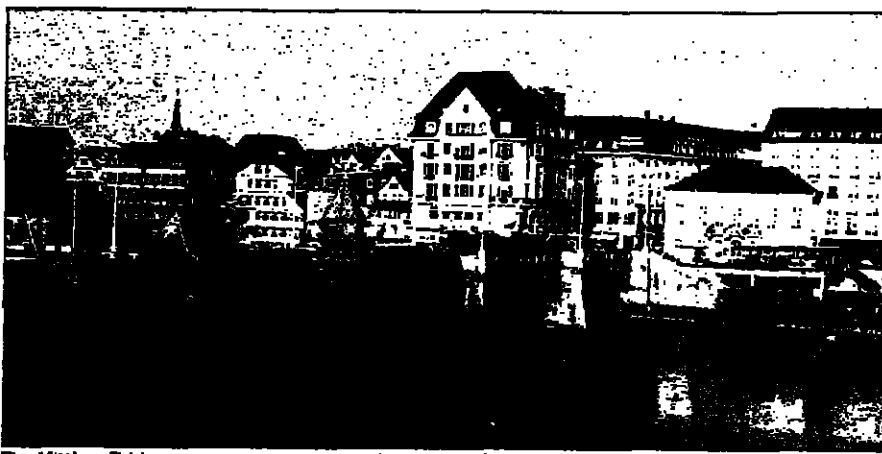
Drop into Cafe Florian (00 41 61 261 5754), at Totentanz 1 for a reasonably priced break from the crowds; choose from the menu or their delicious ready-made snacks and open sandwiches, displayed temptingly close to the cake stand. For a riverside view sit in the room at the back.

Get your bearings

Basel fords the Rhine at the point where France, Germany and Switzerland share borders. Settled since at least the first century BC, it is now an important commercial centre with a vibrant theatre and lively university. The Old Town and most tourist sights are on the south bank of the river, as is the main bank office (4) at Schiffstrasse 5 (00 41 61 268 69 69). There's also a small tourist office in the SBB rail station (5) (which serves Swiss and French destinations, and is not to be confused with the Badischer Bahnhof terminus, serving Germany).

An aperitif

The Brasserie Basel-Scab, (6) opposite the Rathaus, houses both a bar and a more traditional cafe. Cocktails on offer include a Blue Angel (at Sfr12), a bilious mix of Curacao and Champagne.



The Mittere Bridge, as its name suggests, joins the middle of the city across the Rhine

Take a ride

The most remarkable deal for visitors to Basel is that, once booked into a hotel, you're entitled to a free mobility ticket, giving free access to Basel's public transport network for the duration of your stay and a bus ride back to the airport. For a view of both sides of the Rhine, take tram 5 from the railway station north to the Messeplatz (9). If you don't qualify for the mobility ticket, a single fare costs Sfr2.50 (just over a pound). Tickets can be bought from machines beside the stops.



The best way to see the city is by tram

A walk in the park

Cross the Rhine to Claraplatz, then take tram 31 to the small but hauntingly named Solitude Park (10). Hum the Billie Holiday tune as you stroll along Solitude Promenade, before rejoining the human and mechanical world in the Tinguely Museum (museum entry fee at your discretion, good coffee upstairs).

Sunday morning: go to church

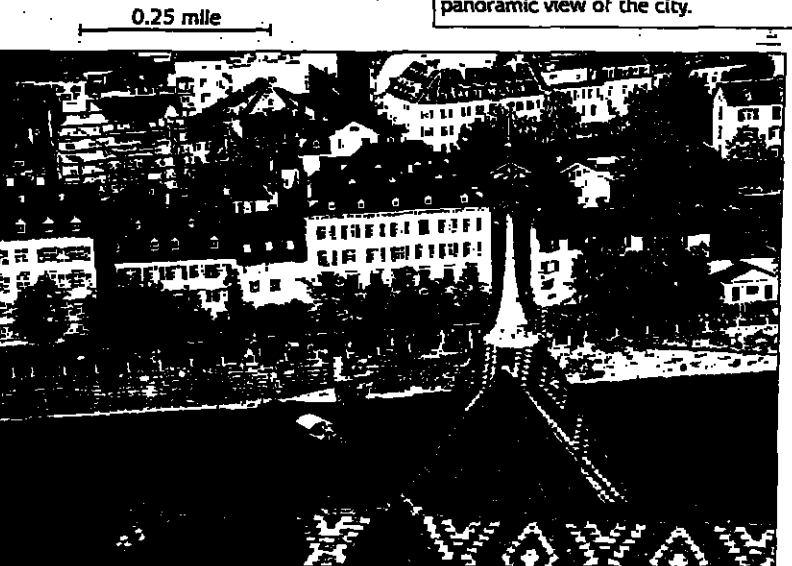
The Münster's (11) spire is visible from much of the city. However, it's only close up that you appreciate the diamond-shaped green and yellow mosaic on the roof, the hideous beasts carved on its walls, and the elaborate doorway. A monument to Basel's turbulent religious history, the church also houses the tomb of Erasmus of Rotterdam, the humanist thinker and early European Sunday service starts at 10am, and the cathedral can be visited by non-worshippers in the afternoon (admission: Sfr5). Before leaving, walk through the cloisters or round to the back of the church for a panoramic view of the city.

Cultural afternoon

Allow plenty of time for the Kunstmuseum (12) at 16 St Alban-Graben: its two floors house Switzerland's largest art collection, ranging from Renaissance painters to pop art by Lichtenstein. It contains room after room of visual delights, including works by Holbein, several Picassos and a good showing of Impressionists. Entry costs Sfr7, but the sculptures in the courtyard (including Rodin's poignant 'Burghers of Calais') can be viewed free of charge.

Beam down

Fly in to Europe's newest airport, Euroairport, code EAP. Actually, it's just the old Basel-Mulhouse airport, located within French territory but with a road corridor direct to Switzerland. Links from the UK are excellent: discount specialist Hamilton (0171-344 3333) has fares from London in February of £139 and British Airways (0345 222111) has a world offer of £149 until 26 March from Heathrow. Crossair (a Swissair offshoot, 0171-434 7300) currently has flights from either Heathrow, London City, Birmingham or Manchester airports, with flights from Edinburgh to begin shortly. From the airport, follow the signs for Switzerland (as opposed to exiting through France) and take bus 50 to Basel's SBB railway station (13). It takes around 20 minutes and costs Sfr2.80 (£1.20); this is free when you come to go home, thanks to the mobility ticket (see Take a Ride).



The Münster spire is visible from much of the city

GLOBAL AGENDA

London

If you've been paying attention, you will know that since the start of the year the capital has already hosted three big travel exhibitions. Destinations '99, though, has grown into the biggest, with more than 500 exhibitors happy to advise you on the best way to San José and how to avoid getting stuck up the Yangtze without a paddle.

Ten geographically themed "worlds" aim to give you a taste of holidays in various locations or with a specific theme, such as African World or World of Cruising. All the usual travel suspects, from Judith Chalmers to Jennifer Cox, will be there, with a series of talks and presentations. The biggest attraction in the first two days (the show opened on Thursday) proved to be the gallery that was showing all the finalists in the Wanderlust/Independent/Canon Travel Photograph of the Year competition (see page 19).

At 12 noon and 5pm today, the cable and satellite station Travel Channel will be staging a road show, with Frank Bough and Cheryl Baker (ex-Buck's Fizz) to help you in making your mind up. Wish you were here? You will do. Destinations '99 takes place at Earl's Court, London SW5, today and tomorrow from 10am to 5.30pm, admission £5.



Rome

Having successfully glamorised voyeurism and bondage, Helmut Newton (above) tones it down a little in this wonderfully erudite portrait of Italy's capital. The exhibition documents Newton's "72 hours in Rome" through a photographic diary that records all the city's buildings, from the tiny to the titanic. Newton's unique visual slant captures the city's architecture as it really is – a mixture of peace and chaos, contemporary glamour and ancient tradition, boldness and humility – and a dash of sexual mystique, naturally. But hurry: you have to find a flight to Rome by tomorrow. Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna Contemporanea, Via Francesco Crispi 24 (0039 06 474 2843). Until 21 February

Sydney

Get away from the Monet madness currently afflicting London, yet indulge a passion for Impressionism at the same time with a visit to Sydney: air fares are about as low as they will ever be.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales is hosting the final week of its Classic Cézanne exhibition. The show is a collection of works from all over the world, including loans from the Louvre and the National in London. Classic Cézanne is at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (00 61 2 9225 1711). Until 28 February

India

Fed up with wintry weather here? Head east. March is tacked with pure vitality in north India. The beginning of the month heralds the climax of spring, celebrated with the festival of Holi, starting 2 March. The celebration of colours begins with bonfires to mark the end of winter and to ward off evil spirits. Coloured powder and water are thrown over anyone and everyone.

For visitors brave enough to join in, Agra is said to be the best place to venture out. BEATRICE HODGKIN

24-HOUR ROOM SERVICE: ATLANTIS, PARADISE ISLAND



red snapper in Fathoms restaurant at Atlantis – Sun International's \$500m extravaganza in the Bahamas – find themselves bang in the middle of the food chain as these sleek marine predators glide behind them, in the world's largest tropical aquarium.

From a distance the soaring sugar-pink turrets of the resort's plush new Royal Towers seem to rise from the ocean waves, joined together by the 10-room Bridge Suite (a snip at £15,000 a night). Film stars can be spotted lounging in the resort's vast sun-drenched waterscape – among waterfalls, bridges and winding paths – beside the 60ft Mayan-temple waterslide and seven-acre snorkelling lagoon. Treasures from the "real" lost city of Atlantis add a touch of culture. This is a fantasy land, dedicated to delivering the ultimate holiday-hotel experience – at a price.

Whatever else Atlantis is, it isn't cheap, and the smart shops – Cartier, Gucci et al – the 38 restaurants, bars and lounges,

and a football-field sized casino, can swallow money at a terrifying rate. But, dollars apart, Atlantis is tremendous fun, and wonderful for families. Just don't feed the sharks.

ARE YOU LYING COMFORTABLY?

Best rooms: Water views cost more. Beware rooms with a view of the building site for Atlantis Phase III. Do visitors in these get a discount? "Er, no...". Beds in the Royal Towers: King and Queen size. Freebies: Neutrogena toiletries. Temperature: As you like it – with guest-controlled air conditioning, and sliding doors leading to a French balcony.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Television: Fifty or so channels. Internet: Laptops plug in to a communications socket. Phone: \$8.78 per minute to the UK when dialled direct; voicemail. Switchboards: In three calls they (1) were engaged (2) picked up after 8 rings (3) picked up immediately. Whatever you ask, the Atlantean operators say "My pleasure", and you feel that it is

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Paradise Island, Bahamas; tel: 001 242 363 3000; Website: www.sunint.com/atlantis Local transport: Taxis. Many



Royal Towers: the bridge suite costs £15,000 a night

Bahamian drivers carry a Bible in the car, but that won't stop them doubling the price of a ride. It takes 10 minutes or so to get to downtown Nassau. Time from Heathrow/Gatwick: 10 hours to Nassau Airport, then a 25-minute cab ride. Paradise Island has its own airport for local flights to and from Florida. Helipad: Yes – or just take the yacht and park it in the 63-slip marina.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A double room at the weekend in the 1,202-room Royal Towers costs from \$370 to \$420 (£225-£255) per night in winter, slightly cheaper on weekdays and in summer. There's a 10 per cent resort tax on top, plus a daily \$6.25 for a "maid and energy" surcharge and a 15 per cent gratuity on food and beverages. A cooked "Atlantis" breakfast

is \$19.50; plus gratuity, plus a \$2 room-service delivery charge. A lunchtime Caesar salad (\$11) in the casino's Atlas Bar and Grill was disappointing: the "shaved" parmesan was powdered, the dressing bland and the few small pieces of chicken (an extra \$8) were small, stringy and fatty. Service was charming, though.

I'm not paying that: Look out for packages – Kuoni offers seven nights, including BA flights, for £1,137. Or book into one of the less expensive, older sections of the resort – Beach Towers – from \$240 (£150) per night.

Sell too much? Check into the Sivananda ashram, just down the beach. It's only \$60 (£37) or so a night and with eight hours' "mandatory" yoga and meditation a day you'll be too tired to spend a cent. RACHEL HENRY

MODERN MANNERS: YOUR CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP GUIDE TO SURVIVING THE MINEFIELD

Dear Serena

Dear Serena,
A colleague recently went on a three-week holiday. When she came back, she looked completely different - as though the wind had changed while she was hearing some juicy gossip - and has remained that way. She claimed that the holiday was spent at a spa, but we are all convinced that she has had plastic surgery. Does it fall within the code of good manners to ask someone if they've had a face job, or do we have to keep quiet?

People who spend money on plastic surgery are convinced that no one can tell they've had it done, much as toupee-wearers believe that no one can tell. It is, therefore, very spiteful to shatter their illusions. Unless you really dislike your colleague, it's kinder to keep quiet. If, however, you only dislike her a bit, you can have some fun by expressing concern for her well-being at regular intervals. "You're looking terribly tired. Are you all right?" is a classic phrase guaranteed to raise a laugh.

Dear Serena,
I have been found guilty of white-collar fraud and expect to be sent away for roughly three months when I go for my sentencing hearing at the beginning of March. My problem is that I've not been able to bring myself to tell my ageing parents. How can I keep the news from them while I serve my sentence?

Look, Charlie: at some point you are going to have to face up to the reality of your situation. If you pretend that your crime and its uncovering have never existed and that you are merely on a sabbatical in inferior accommodation, the likelihood is that you will fail to extract any lessons from the situation and will think that you can get away with further infractions of the law. Which, as you are obviously not a very competent criminal, will likely result in further jail sentences of greater severity. And then what will your elderly parents think? Instead of spending the time trying to work out how not to get

caught for a crime you've already been caught for, you should perhaps spend it trying to work out a means of breaking the news to your parents with as little hysteria as possible. Remember: a life lived in fantasy is a life un-lived.

Dear Serena,
I am getting married soon, and am worried that there is some obligation to have a stag night as part of the celebrations. I really don't want one, but feel under some pressure from my acquaintances to agree to having one. Do I have to?

No. If they step the pressure up too hard,



agree to have one on condition that your fiancée and all wives and girlfriends are included in the party. They will stop pestering you immediately.

Dear Serena,
My stepister is an awkward cuss, and can usually be found standing on the sidelines making sarcastic remarks. At our parents' wedding, for instance, when I tried to break the ice in the registry office by kissing the members of my new family, she reacted by starting backwards and saying "Ooh, very sophisticated" in a tone that implied that I was being pretentious. I have reached my wit's end with her, having my invitations and attempts to be nice

to her constantly snubbed - but we are linked now, whether we like it or not. How should I behave towards her in future?

Stepchildren often make the mistake of thinking that they should have relationships with the parents' spouses' offspring. This is not the case. Just because one of your parents married one of theirs doesn't mean that you have to give the silly bitch the time of day if she insists on making things unpleasant, though you should try to keep your feelings to yourself around the parents in question. Presumably, as you are adults, you don't have to see her more than once or twice a year at most. From now on, kiss anyone who is nice to you and shake your stepister loosely by the hand while standing as close to arm's length as you can get. Rude people should be made allowances for when it's obviously a one-off occurrence; if it's habitual, they should be ignored until they can grow up and be civilised.

Dear Serena,
I've been publicising my pop career with liberal press releases about my drink and drugs bell over the last few years, but it's getting to be a bit of a strain to keep up. How do I alter my image so I can live a cleaner, more professional life?

If you want to live cleanly, retire. Otherwise, you're going to have to jolly well accept the demands as well as the perks of the rock'n'roll lifestyle. Nobody wants a pop star who tells anecdotes about their health and fitness regime. If you have doubts about this, just keep a picture of Cliff Richard pasted up by your bathroom mirror as a horrible example of what can happen to an entertainer who goes to the bad.

Knotty problems with the world today? Write to Dear Serena, The Independent, 18th Floor, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, where they will be treated with the customary sympathy



ARIES

YOUR PERSISTENT belief that there must be a better life out there, somewhere, is a source of much discontent. It is certainly true that many of your friends do find themselves in a better position than you (they weren't born under Aries, for one thing) and those who are worse off tend to be somewhat better adjusted to their lot. However, your restlessness will reward you eventually - that is, you will get what you deserve. Be brave about that and you never know, you may well end up much better off after all.



TAURUS

YOUR PROBLEM is that of infatuation rather than permanent disloyalty. That's the good news. But fickleness frightens you; you've never had enough practice at love's r'n'm. Normally, you are cautious enough to keep friendship from misleading you into acts friends should avoid, but suddenly you are not quite sure of your moral boundaries. Whether you get into real trouble depends on friends. Your dizziness will resolve itself into an even more peculiar period where generosity rules. Will you ever find ideal love?



GEMINI

ARE YOUR friends feeling strong? You are definitely going to need something to carry you through the week. It is hard to see your way through the ripple of worry and nameless anxiety. A disabling aspect with Neptune condemns you to the sofa. Here you will be both the object and the conduit of gossip. You will not be able to keep any secrets, except in the Oxford sense (telling only one person at a time). That is where your friends come in (and, alas, out).



CANCER

WELL-WISHERS MAKE suggestions to improve your life, but your rebuttals are effortless - there's nothing anyone can do. While in this voluntary confinement there is at least room for self-improvement. There are corners that have needed cleaning out for a long time (decades in some cases). This aggressive hygiene will stand you well when you re-enter the world: there will be those who no longer dare to make vulgar demands on your exquisite nature.



POPPY FOLLY

YOUR STARS: IT COULD HAPPEN

Why are no more poets born under Pisces? Well, that shows how much you know: the sign is swimming in poets, actors, drunks and even more generally disabled defectives like Patty Hearst and Sam Peckinpah and Cardinal Newman and everyone else who fell in love with unsavoury maniacs just because of their firepower. Why else would Ivana Trump have chosen to be born under Pisces?

There is a famous incompetence about this sign; it is said they have all the structure of a glass of water without the glass. That's why Robert "Madwoman's Breakfast" Altman is born here, and also that feckless Mexican who eventually managed to massacre the Alamo garrison (but lost control of the movie rights and died in poverty).

Unsurprisingly, it's the sign of psychic knowledge, of the highest spiritual abilities. Here we find Meher Baba, the Indian mystic who coined the phrase Don't Worry Be Happy the also lost control of the royalties



LEO

THE SUN is shining where the sun don't shine. Pluto is brought into play by your ruling planet and your deepest depths are opened up. Without your usual buoyancy, you are thrashing about above a gulf of dark, dark water. Anything can happen. You find great sexual energies are made available, but if you can wipe that smirk off your face, there will be far less merit in doing than not doing. Sublimate for psychic success. And just ignore those shafts of jealousy.



VIRGO

THIS WEEK, you will be able to do what you do best - get bogged down in unimportant detail and practise inhibition (as well as inspiring inhibition in others). Things won't turn out as badly as you expect (they couldn't, frankly), but the overload will shut your systems down and after worrying too much, you may suffer a breakdown and become careless (not the same as carefree). Everyone will benefit from a period of your staring wordlessly into space.



LIBRA

YOU DON'T know why you are acting like this (later you will just have to quash the rumour that your parents were cousins). A loss of spirits may lead you into dangerously deep introspection (Librans can't bear too much of that). But your personal recession turns out to have been useful *pour mieux sauter*. Venus is expansive - oh how you enjoy that, and you are not the only one. Indeed, beneficiaries of your erotic expertise can be as numerous as they wish to be. So go on, be really generous with yourself.



SCORPIO

YOU MAY feel a glow from your underworld as the Sun moves in with Pluto. Light will be shed on things which, up until now, have been wisely kept in the dark. Everything that is revealed to you will also become apparent to people normally too stupid to know what they are looking at. Remember about management: everything must have been decided before the meeting they're holding to decide on everything. You will have to do better with your spouse, however.



SAGITTARIUS

YOUR FRIENDS and colleagues welcome your generous nature (if not your generously measured advice). Your cheerfulness is so pronounced as to tire your flaccid contemporaries. Your presence expands into areas you've never experienced - be careful people aren't laughing at your butt. This paranoia will not prevent you from expressing powerfully phrased emotional analyses of your friends. Remember, if your advice isn't accepted you may find you have to follow it yourself.



CAPRICORN

VANITY, VANITY, all is vanity, Capricorn says, but only because you only ever talk about yourselves. The hall of mirrors you live in throws up some very odd reflections - so odd, you've persuaded yourself that they're other people. Reality breaks in now. The Sun is enlivening Saturn. Through discipline, limitations and strictures, through bondage and riding-tack, you will find the fulfilment of your dreams. Avoid photography while you're like this. Avoid lawyers, too.



AQUARIUS

IN POLITICS, as in love, there is something of the slapper about Aquarius, and never more so than when Venus compromises herself with your ruling planet, as she rather shuttishly does this week. But at least you know you're alive when you're like this. You excel at parties where you can keep moving. Your intense friendliness will be confused for romantic attraction and opportunities will open up as a result. Naturally, you shouldn't take advantage of this; naturally, you will.



PISCES

DON'T GET suckered into fearing for your health: there are many professionals out there who have a vested interest in persuading you that you are sick. Just cheer up, or more plausibly, stop trying so hard to be cheerful. You are blessed with a sublime sense of beauty which will severely hinder your base attempts to get more sex. There may be a religious dimension to this. You are led into the ineffable where you lose yourself in ecstasy. It is all totally normal.

CLASSIC CARTOONS

MARTIN PLIMMER ON
GEORGE CRUIKSHANK



Night-mare

EVERY PHOTOGRAPH of caricaturist George Cruikshank catches him on a bad-hair day. He managed to be bald and hairy simultaneously and looked like something he had drawn. Cruikshank didn't care for beautiful things, or at any rate couldn't see them. He drew with the rude, exaggerated gusto of the 18th century, a style now mirrored in the work of Scarfe and Steadman. Cruikshank was more affectionate though, and his humour was rooted in common

experiences, like toothaches and nightmares. Who can say they've never had this vicious fellow with the spiky fork and Turkish Teletubby hat riding a pig across their chest at night? Cruikshank didn't care for inventions. He ridiculed rail and balloon travel. Richard Branson would have been his for breakfast. In the end, Victorian society rejected his grotesqueries but he continued to depict it miming and affected in preposterous clothing - quite a check for someone with joke hair.

SO TALK shows like Vanessa have been faking it. We non-experts always thought so. But now the experts have woken up to it; so it must be true. It wouldn't matter that things were faked, if the boundary between fact and fiction had not become so eroded. There is no clear labelling.

Many of these shows skirt the issues they purport to investigate. Their presenters ensure that the right questions are not asked and the discussion stays in the shallows. And that the venom of the right-feeling mob gets directed at the scapegoats. I know, I've been there. But these issues are soluble only by free debate. And this is only entertainment. But then victimisation and intolerance are national pastimes. In the recent show-trial, Hoddle was sacked not for being a bad manager, but for being disliked. He was guilty of being different; of putting a personal religion ahead of the state religion: soccer. Better luck next incarnation.

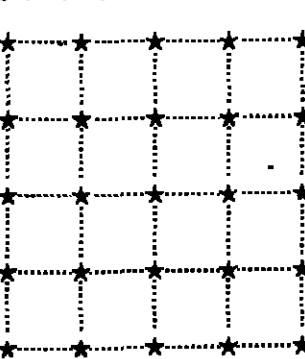
It is uncomfortable to see people victimised just for saying stupid things. Views are not changed by bullying and spite, but by example. By patient discussion. By inspiring. By their owners being brought round to seeing their inconsistency. Stupid remarks, like mistakes, are a wonderful didactic opportunity. But intelligent debate was stifled



PUZZLEMASTER

BY CHRIS MASLANKA

and passed up for a witch-hunt. I don't hold it against Tony Blair for stating his views on Hoddle on Richard and Judy's show. I like a man who's in



touch with his prejudices. England is our national team, and we are all entitled to a view. I do, however, hold it against him for lecturing us on what to eat. How dare he export his expertise from an area in which he knows nothing? Avoiding beef was easy, although it appeared in the most unlikely foods. But now that Blair is his own Gummer's daughter, how do we avoid

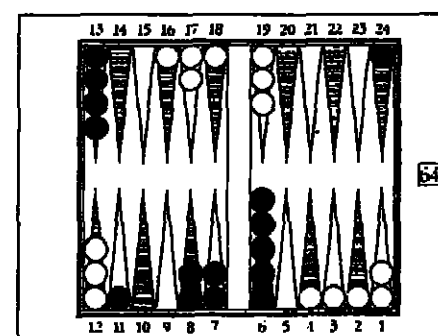
genetically modified food? There's no proper labelling. We've been eating it willy-nilly. Of course Tony has the advice of experts. But it is well known that for every scientific expert who gives advice, there is another advising the exact opposite. It is all a question of which set of experts you choose.

Will we like living in Monsanto Island? Do we want them to build a new Jerusalem in England's ungreen and unpleasant land? Will hippopotamuses be safe to eat? Won't gene-escape mean a loss of choice? Isn't the ecology damaged enough without introducing vast unknowns? This is not entertainment; it needs thinking through. We have a right to a view. The message on the side of the yellow lorry that dumped four tons of GM soya on Blair's doorstep at least raised a smile. It read: "Tony, don't swallow Bill's seed." Soya beans warned. Points to Ponder: To judge from the puzzles sent in, Puzzlemaster seems capable of inspiring by example. Rosie Forth of Colchester sends this teaser inspired by the dome puzzle (30 Jan).

Beginning at any star, trace a continuous path along the network, visiting each star once and once only, finishing where you started. Alternatively, prove it to be impossible. Well? Please send comments to: indy@puzzlemaster.co.uk

BACKGAMMON

CHRIS BRAY



WHEN SHOULD you offer an initial double? In general, you should do so when you have a threat such that your opponent will not be able to take a double on your next turn. In addition, the position should be such that you will not immediately lose the advantage whatever happens. The position above is a classic doubling situation. Black has one man back versus five for white. He has a big lead in the race. He is threatening to hit the man on white's bar-point and/or some of the white men in his home board. If black hits two men, for example with 62 - played 24/18*, 6/4* or 33 - played 7/4(2)*, 6/3(2)*, and white fails to hit back, then black will

have lost his market by a long way. He must double now to activate his gammon threat (remember the Jacoby Rule states that you cannot win a gammon unless the cube has been turned). White has a take but it's closer than you might think. With five men back already, it will take a long time for white to establish any position of strength and he will often have to play a back game, not ideal by any means. When this position occurred in a chonette black correctly doubled. All the team players took and two of them actually beavered - a huge error of judgement but proving, once again, that the biggest errors in backgammon are made with the cube.

ITV/Regions

ITV/Regions

BBC 1 *N Ireland*
AS BBC1 LONDON & SE
except: 10.30 Let Me Entertain You (54792), 11.00 Harbour Lights (587773), 11.55 Heart of the Matter (380557), 12.35 *News*; 1.00 *The 25th Ward Movie* (58234), 2.25 **BBC News** 24 (52700532).

Angels
as LWT except: 12.30 Sunday Supplement (77956), 2.00 Eye of the Eagle (814), 3.20 Living a Bug's Life (841), 3.30 *Murder, She Wrote* (686159), 3.55 *The Murdoch Mysteries* (646808), 4.30 *News* (146559), 6.00 *Wildfire Rescue* (570), 12.50 *Film: Dillinger* (495587), 2.30 *Highlander* (345064), 3.25 *Jonathan Dimbleby* (590235), 4.30 *Cybernetic* (473855), 4.40 *News* (146559), 5.00 *ITV Nightscreen* (8362149), 5.50 *Coronation Street* (95754).

Central

Newsweek (3497678). 12.55
Central News (48940131). 2.00 It's
Your Shout (5545150). 2.40 Murder
She Wrote (3066792). 3.30 Film:
Tobruk (53518). 5.30 Central News

Country (570) 4.20 Jobfinder (3920+193) 4.45 It's Your Shout (1440667).
HTV Wales
As LWT except: 12.00 My

Welsh Agenda (1835696) **12.55**
HTV News (48940131). **2.00** Film:
The Alamo (85771773). **4.40** Party
in the Park (4124044). **5.40** HTV
News (865353). **6.00** Soccer

HTV West
As HTV Wales except: 12.25

Meridian
As LWT except: **12.30** 7 Days
(2047137). **12.50** Meridian News

Getaways (6131). **2.30** Murder, She Wrote (2984). **3.30** Film: The

Day Out (9975860). 5.35 Meridian News and Weather (146599). 6.00 Monkey Business (570). 12.50 As Anlgia 5.00 Freescreen (95754).

As LWT except: 12.30
Westcountry Weekend Match
7.00pm 8.00 World of Wonder

(62800978). **2.25** Murder, She Wrote (62803063). **3.20** Film: In Like Flint (68191773). **5.35** Westcountry News (146599). **6.00** The Great Escape (570). **12.50** As

Yorkshire
As LWT except: 12.30 Trawler
(77985). 2.00 Calendar News
(52220957). 2.05 The Making of a

New Love Boat (6269421), 4.00
Videotech Brit Winners Special
(421), 4.30 Coronation Street
(63624), 5.30 Calendar News and
Sport (893995), 6.00 Goals on

Tyne Tees
As Yorkshire except: 12.30

East News (52220957), 5.30 North
East News and Sport (893995),
5.00 Cafe Sport (570).

FILM OF THE DAY

BAD LIEUTENANT (1120pm C4) Harvey Keitel's *Last Tango in Paris* (although the film itself is not a patch on Bertolucci's 1972 masterpiece) – a raw, honest performance in Abel Ferrara's baroque (to say the least) character study. Keitel is a depraved, debt-laden, crack-smoking New York cop who finds bizarre salvation while investigating the

SATELLITE & CABLE

9.00 Late Night Currie.
Edwina Currie discusses
the weekend's big
issues. Phone 0250
909563. Plus a full news
report at the top of the
hour.

10.00 Up All Night.
5.00 - 6.00 Reports.

Classic FM
(90.00-105MHz-FM)
10.00-12.00 Classic Romance
12.00 Across the
Threshold with David
Marsden 12.00 Alan Martin
4.00 Margaret Howard.
6.00 Countdown Top
Ten. 7.00 Smooth Class-
ical. 8.00 Seven Days
Sunday. 9.00 The
Opera. 11.00 Michael
Mappin. 12.00 Evening
Concert. 3.00 - 6.00
Mark Griffiths.

Virgin Radio
(125.197-126.042 MW)
10.00-12.00 Mark
Marsden 12.00 Alan Martin
4.00 Nicky Baker.
6.00 Don Abbot. 7.00
Janey Lee Grace. 7.30
Hardy Galt. 8.00
6.45 Janey Lee Grace.
10.00 James Merritt.
12.00 Steve Power. 4.30
6.30 Richard Allen.

World Service
(19.8kHz LW)
10.00 The World Today.
12.00 Meridian (Feature).
12.22 The World Today.
12.30 The World Today.
12.45 The World Today.
1.30 The World Today.
3.30 Sports Roundup.
3.30 Global Business.
4.00 The World Today.
4.00 Paul Rocco.

Talk Radio
(105.00-106.00 FM)
10.00 Dark Derby and Peter
Richards. 12.00 Russel
Croft. 3.00 Nicky
Hornes. Access All Year.
5.00 Let's Talk Conspiracy
with Don McLeary and
Sanjiv Choti. 8.00
Cheating Hearts with
Jayne Irving. 10.00
The World Today. 10.0 -
11.00 Mike Dickin.

Sky Premier
6.00 Premier Fables
(42957) 7.00 The Good
Old Boys (1995) (82040)
7.00 The Swan Princess:
The Secret of the Castle
(1997) (59303) 10.30
Dragonheart (1996)
10.30 The Good Wood
Budd (17837) 13.00
The Good Old Boys (1995)
13.00 The Swan Princess:
The Secret of the
Castle (1997) (62321) 15.00
Dragonheart (1996) (70519)
16.00 Turbo: A Power
Rangers Movie (1997)
16.00 7.00 Barry
Manilow's Film Night (47201)
18.00 I'm Loving You (1995)
(46635) 19.15 Courage
under the Fire (1996)
(83040) 21.00
1.30 Last Dance (1993)
(95250) 2.55 - 6.00
City of the Century (1985)
(529142C)

Sky Moviehits
6.00 Buck and the Magic
Bracelet (1937)
6.00 Cosmic Shock (1997)
(59083) 10.00 The Fallen
Soldier (1943)
12.00 Playtime to Win
(1997) (59686) 2.00
The Fall of the House
(1987) (60872) 4.25
Buck and the Magic
Bracelet (1937)
6.00 Cosmic
Shock (1997)
6.00 Hard Way (1991)
(44605) 10.00
Kier: A Journal of
Mysteries (1989)
(22222) 11.30
Salvador (1989)
(9092247) 1.45
Eyes Wide Open (1988)
(22222) 3.55
The Fall of the House
(1987) (60872)
5.00 7.30 Mr. Holland's
Opus (1986) (27593).

Sky Cinema
10.00 "Barry Business"
(1992) (557659) 12.45
Frasier (1993) (387659)
2.15 Rebecca (1995)
4.45 The Fall of the House
(1987) (60872) 7.00
6.00 Magic Town (1947)
(175773) 8.00 Tearing
at the Seams (1992)
(70477) 10.45 Big Sky (1992)
(2366421) 12.45 Mr.
T (1989) (706597) 2.40 The
Fall of the House (1987)
(60872) 4.25 The
Cheaters (1994) (718339),
5.50 Copse.

FilmFest
6.00 "Foxy Fanny" (1957)

RADIO LISTINGS APPEAR

[illegible][illegible]

FULL 7-DAY TV AND RADIO LISTINGS APPEAR IN 'THE INFORMATION'

هكذا من الأهل

YOUR MONEY

HOW TO MAKE IT • HOW TO SPEND IT

The best laptop computers tried and tested

SHOPPING, PAGE 10

How Mercedes reinvented the small car

MOTORING, PAGE 12

What happens when TV comes to your home

PROFESSOR PAGES

How low could they go?

If loans seem cheap right now, you just wait. By Teresa Hunter

A FIRE sale seems to be blazing on the personal loans front, with Egg cutting its interest rate further this week. But borrowers would do well to study the details of the latest bargain basement offers, because these sexy rates are not always what they seem.

Unsecured loans are a popular way of paying for a new car, home improvements, holidays or weddings, because the monthly repayment is fixed at the outset, making budgeting easy. Traditionally they were more expensive than an overdraft, but in recent months a flurry of new-style loans from Egg, Northern Rock and the Woolwich, plus intense competition from other lenders, has pushed prices down.

But borrowers should beware, because some of the cheapest deals around are conditional on buying an often expensive payment-protection insurance policy, which pushes up the monthly cost sharply. If borrowers decline this cover, then they must pay a higher rate of interest.

Northern Rock, which has a headline-grabbing annual percentage rate (APR) of 9.5, charges a much higher annual interest of 12.5 per cent to customers who do not wish to buy the insurance. First Direct and Marks & Spencer also hike their rates unless you opt in. Even Alliance & Leicester has a similar dual-interest on its top tier for loans of more than £10,000.

"This practice has been criticised as 'fundamentally wrong' by the chief consumer watchdog, the Office of Fair Trading, which believes that the cost of compulsory insurance should be included in the APR calculation, so that borrowers can easily compare the true price of a loan. An OFT spokesman said: 'If an interest policy is mandatory, then we believe it is an essential part of the agreement, and the cost should be reflected in the headline APR rate. Not to do so, in our view, is fundamentally wrong. Where

the insurance is not mandatory, then that is a different situation."

This view coincides with that of the European Parliament, whose consumer credit directive is likely to force insurance costs to be included in APRs, when it comes into force later this year. But the regulations as they exist at present are not clear, and the Department of Trade and Industry is consulting over how best to implement the EU directive.

To be fair, some of the lenders themselves are unhappy with the current confusion. A spokesman for First Direct, which slices 2 per cent off its APRs for customers who take out the insurance, said: "We would welcome some clarification. The convention among lenders has been not to include insurance in the APRs, even when they are obligatory, but this can be confusing for customers."

Until then customers should treat APRs with caution. Although Northern Rock's 9.5 APR looks like the cheapest around for a £5,000 loan over three years it actually costs more than Clydesdale Bank's loan which has a headline APR of 12.8, because Northern Rock's insurance is more expensive. A customer would pay £181.88 monthly with Clydesdale, compared with £182.37 at Northern Rock, which makes the former nearly £18 cheaper, despite a higher APR.

Lombard Direct is another lender causing eyebrows to raise. It advertises a league-table-topping headline rate of 11.9 APR, but this is only available to customers with gold-star credit ratings. Customers are assessed individually and given their own APR, depending on their previous debt-repayment record and where they live.

But the really bad boys of the personal-loan field are the main High Street banks. Lloyds, Barclays, and NatWest are all still charging an APR of around 20 per cent on some of their



Don't lose the plot in the uncharted territory of personal loans

Mirror Syndication Int

UNSECURED LOANS				
£5,000 over 3 years				
WITH INSURANCE	phone	APR	monthly payment	
Northern Rock	0345 421421	9.5	182.37	
Phone A Loan (Yorkshire Bank)	0800 1386898	11.9	183.40	
Direct Line	0181 680 9966	12.2	182.34	
Clydesdale	0800 240024	12.8	181.88	
NatWest	0500302013	12.8	183.95	
Liverpool Victoria	0800 134134	13.3	183.78	
NO INSURANCE				
Lombard Direct	0800 215000	11.9	164.39	
Phone A Loan	0800 1386898	11.9	164.61	
Tesco	0845 6006016	12	164.81	
Direct Line	0181 680 9966	12.2	165.22	
Capital One Direct	0800 216252	12.3	165.25	
Northern Rock	0345 421421	12.3	165.44	

unsecured loans, even though base lending rates have spiralled downwards to 5.5 per cent, giving them a profit margin of 15 percentage points.

Andy Thompson, unsecured lending manager at Egg, denies there is a "fire sale" taking place. "It's not that we new lenders are not making

healthy profits. We lend at a good margin. But the traditional lenders, like the High Street banks, are making super-profits. Interest rates have been falling for some time, but there has been very little movement in some lending rates. I believe even the keenly priced loans still have further to fall."

Egg this week trimmed its loan rates further on the upper tiers. Borrowers can now fix their repayments at 13.4 APR on loans between £2,500 and £4,999, 11.9 APR on sums between £5,000 and £9,999 and 10.2 APR on amounts above £10,000.

He argues that banks are now able to offer personal loans more cheaply because of the improvement in credit-rating information. This has made the business so attractive that lenders have been busy designing loans to capture the public's imagination. Unlike traditional packages, Egg allows the debt to be repaid early without penalties, and customers can take repayment holidays as well.

Northern Rock's new Together loan allows customers to borrow up to 95 per cent of the value of their home at a 6.7 APR (the debt is secured). Customers can then borrow an additional 30 per cent of their home's worth. And the Woolwich will allow you to extend your flexible mortgage to raise funds at a two-year fix of 5.75 per cent.

BARGAIN HUNTER



Property of the week

It needs total redecoration and the grounds are overgrown, but on the other hand, £240,000 isn't that much to pay for a seven-bedroom Georgian house with an indoor pool in its 52ft conservatory. The same amount would barely buy a second-floor flat in Notting Hill. Royston House in North Walsham, Norfolk, stands in four acres and has a number of outbuildings including a drive-through double-length garage with automatic doors at each end. There's a large reception hall, 17ft drawing room with white-grain marble fire surround, family room, formal dining room and a 21ft dining kitchen. One of the bedrooms has a verandah with steps leading down to the courtyard. The grounds include an orchard, a pond with waterfall and a large greenhouse in need of repair. Details from Brown & Co, 01603 767606.

ROSALIND RUSSELL

Car of the Week

The UK's largest car manufacturer, London Taxis International, aside, is Blackpool's very own TVR. Their combination of handsome lightweight glassfibre bodies and powerful engines has been a recipe for success. Not that long ago though they stumbled from one financial crisis to another over three eventful decades. A remnant of the time that wedge-shaped sports cars powered by Ford Granada engines ruled the earth can be found in Brundell's (01553 811811) showroom, near King's Lynn. This TVR Tasmia (named after the owner's ex-girlfriend) has covered just 6,800 miles, is automatic and open-topped. The Eighties are back, apparently, and this Seventies throwback bought from the family firm of ex-Formula One driver and current expert commentator Martin would make the perfect collector's item at just £3,950.

JAMES RUPPERT

Deal of the Week

IF YOU are sure that a PEP is a good idea and you have not yet bought your 1998-99 entitlement there are some offers around from providers desperate to vacuum up your money before the end of March. Royal & Sun Alliance is offering a 4 per cent discount on its unit trust PEP range including its Portfolio fund spread across a range of trusts and markets. Midland Bank and Legal & General are each offering a Capital-Protected PEP which guarantees full return of capital, and gains of up to 65-70 per cent over six or 6.5 years. S&P is offering a 2 per cent discount on transfers from other managers.

CLIFFORD GERMAN

The brave new world of round-the-clock banking

Accessing your account by phone was once at the cutting edge, yet modern technology will soon make it look passé. By Teresa Hunter

GARY MACKIE is one of thousands of financial-services workers who will be on duty throughout the Easter weekend to capture the last flows of tax-free PEP business, before they are abolished at midnight on Bank Holiday Monday.

He is a financial adviser with Abbey National, which has taken the unprecedented step of opening most of its branches on Good Friday and Bank Holiday Monday to cope with the expected last-minute rush.

And they are not alone. Staff at most large investment houses including Fidelity, Virgin, and Marks & Spencer will be working over the Easter break to make it easy for the

public to exploit the tax-break before it disappears.

Working over a family holiday attracted the wrath of various churches at Christmas, when some staff had to forgo the seasonal festivities to prepare for euro's arrival. The PEPs jamboree, which will keep employees chained to their desks this Easter, could well provoke a similar storm of criticism.

But the world has moved on from the traditional nine-to-five working day. Just as supermarkets open all night, customers now want access to their financial institutions 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

All the major banks now offer an

around-the-clock telephone banking service. First Direct, the first to arrive on the scene 10 years ago, says it receives most of its 45,000 daily calls outside normal banking hours.

Many of the callers throughout the night are shift-workers, from oil rig crews, to student nurses and even actors.

However, long hours and frequent travel are no longer the prerogative of the travelling actor alone. Longer working hours prevent many people from focusing on their financial affairs until well into the twilight shift.

Mark & Spencer financial services regularly opens on Sundays to

meet this demand. A spokesperson explained: "Modern lifestyles leave customers with very little free time. They feel comfortable operating over the telephone. We have to be there when they need us."

This is echoed by Virgin which says it receives a strong steady flow of business from 9pm into the small hours. Its bank is open round-the-clock, and it has just extended the opening hours of its PEP and pensions business to 11pm.

A spokesperson said: "By the time many people have arrived home from work, had something to eat and unwound, it is 9pm or 10pm before they can begin to think about

whether they want a PEP or not.

Prudential's new Egg round-the-clock service found a good chunk of its overnight calls were from people abroad. Head of operations Andy Deller said: "If you have been working in Australia, for example, you will have to deal with a range of complex financial decisions to come home. It's a huge convenience to be able to organise things at a sensible time, even if it happens to be 4am in England."

But the technology is moving rapidly in a direction which could soon make the telephone call centre look as archaic as the bank branch does today.

Within the next two months First Direct will follow Barclays and the Co-op and launch its mobile-phone service. It will transform the way we conduct our financial services, because the mobile phone is the one piece of equipment which can be carried at all times, putting us in control 24 hours a day. First Direct, which is the only bank so far to use over-the-air programming, hopes the phones will be able to carry out transactions in the very near future.

The growth of digital TV could also see a huge surge in the use of the Internet to conduct banking and other financial services, which despite big strides forward is still

something of a select medium. Head of Egg operations Andy Deller explains: "The thing that's holding the Internet back is the fact that only 20 per cent of homes have a PC. Those that do, use the Internet very enthusiastically, but the total numbers are much smaller than we tend to think."

The most exciting new technology is the Micro-wave bank recently developed by NCR, which takes the concept of time famine to the ultimate degree. The microwave door doubles as an easy-to-use interactive touch screen, which allows you to pay bills while you watch your evening meal being cooked.

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Debt through your door

Finance companies are bombarding people with junk mail for loans they can't afford. By Paul Slade

Consumer groups are calling for tighter safeguards to protect vulnerable people from junk mail selling them credit cards or personal loans. This follows a survey showing that card and loan companies spent £222m on selling their products through direct mail in 1998. That translates to nearly 15 per cent of all the money spent on UK junk mail of any form.

National Consumer Council legal officer Harriet Hall says her own organisation's research shows that poorer people resent getting unsolicited offers of credit. Often, she says, these offers come from the same banks which are already chasing the recipient to clear other debt.

Sue Edwards is money advice development officer at the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux. She believes credit card and loan mailings get people into trouble when borrowers fail to think about what might happen in the future. "Sometimes, if you read the small print, you find the low interest rate

they're advertising is only for a short period. Problems also arise when the borrower's own circumstances change through, say, divorce or unemployment. "What happens is that people take out a card or a loan, their circumstances change, and then they can't afford them. That's even more of a problem than people taking out loans they already can't afford."

Hall agrees. "People don't get into debt because they're feckless," she says. "They get into debt because something has made them get into debt." NCC wants to see changes to the opt-out box which is often included as part of material requiring your address. The box lets consumers make it clear they do not want their address sold on for use on another company's mailing list. At the moment, inclusion of the box is voluntary, but ticking it does at least give you an opportunity to cut off junk mail before it arrives.

NCC is calling for the opt-out box to be made compulsory and much more prominent, and for it to be used in a standard format. It hopes these

measures can be made part of new data protection legislation due for implementation next year.

Edwards believes few people take advantage of opt-out boxes at the moment, and would rather see a system which meant consumers had to give express permission before their name could go on a mailing list. NCC agrees this would be the ideal solution, but says legislators will not accept it.

Financial services companies churn out more junk mail than any other industry in the UK, as this month's survey from MMS Market Movements shows. Thirty-three per cent of all the £1.5bn spent on direct mail to UK consumers in 1998 went on selling financial services. Mail order, in second place, accounted for just 18 per cent of the total spend.

Three of the direct mail industry's four biggest spenders - MBNA, Cornhill and Lloyds TSB - are financial services companies. Credit-card provider MBNA, which tops the list, spent £38.5m in 1998, £10m more than even consumer products giant Procter &

Gamble. For every £100 spent on direct mail of any kind, no less than £14.80 is devoted to selling credit cards and personal loans.

MMS spokesman Sebastian Kindersley says other financial services providers are moving to imitate the card companies' techniques. This, he warns, means more and more companies are already using organisations such as charities for joint-venture mailings. "The first segment of financial services to do that in a big way was credit cards. Now it's happening in a lot more product areas, such as life insurance and general insurance."

If you want to reduce your own junk mail, the first step is to contact the Mailing Preference Service, using the address or phone number shown below. The MPS claims a 95 per cent success rate in preventing unsolicited mailings. It takes up to three months for the MPS to circulate your details to its members, however.

Nearly half-a-million people have registered with the service to say they

do not want to receive unsolicited mail. You can also register with MPS to stop junk mail addressed to your home's previous occupant or to stop mail addressed to a member of your family who has recently died.

But MPS cannot help you with mail from companies you originally contacted yourself. Colin Fricker, director of legal affairs at the Direct Marketing Association says: "If you've bought something from a company already, then they're perfectly entitled to send you information about their other services. If you want to stop that, you have to ask the company itself."

Tessa Kelly, director of compliance operations at the MPS, suggests asking for either the customer services department or the direct mail marketing manager when you call. "If companies are sending out mailings, then there is someone responsible for that function."

Mailing Preference Service: 0345 034599. Freepost 22, London W1E 7EZ

Chancellor's taxing riddle



CLIFFORD GERMAN

Does the Chancellor really want to bring back all Middle England's fears about the politics of envy

ONE THING is certain. Gordon Brown will not go down in history as the great reforming Chancellor who simplified capital gains tax. Last year's Budget made things more difficult to calculate not less, without even the compensation of making the tax more productive.

So where will he turn in 1999 in the quest for reform? The hot tip from financial advisers is an overhaul of inheritance tax, and especially potentially exempt transfers, the concession which allows individuals to escape IHT completely on assets given away more than seven years before death (and to qualify for reduced rates of tax if they live for at least three years and then five years but less than seven years after making the gift).

Inheritance tax has always been a voluntary tax which can actually be avoided either by giving assets away before death or putting them into a trust if you can afford the fancy legal advice. But it is potentially a very lucrative tax because of the rapid increase in personal wealth, fuelled by fat cat salaries and soaring share and property values. Although the starting point was raised sharply by the Tories and currently exempts estates worth less than £223,000, getting on for half a million homes in the UK are now liable to IHT quite apart from other assets.

Without another leap in the threshold an increasing number of estates will start paying IHT over the next few years with beneficial effects to the Exchequer and very negative effects on Middle England. If potentially exempt transfers are abolished or the qualifying period is increased to 10 years or more the impact will be even greater.

Alternatively the Chancellor might go back to the old-style Capital Transfer Tax (CTT) introduced by Denis Healey in 1974 which effectively taxed lifetime gifts above a certain size and for good measure triggered a potential capital gains tax liability on gifts. That was replaced by IHT back in 1986 in one of the Nigel Lawson budgets, and one reason was to minimise the punitive impact of the tax on voters. Bringing CTT

back would be unpopular and even if individuals could be forced to police themselves under the self-assessment system with threats of heavy sanctions for anyone caught breaking the rules, it would create a widespread culture of evasion, as well as hostility to the government.

Gordon Brown may have a reputation for having a hair shirt mentality, but does the Chancellor really want to sacrifice the Government's enviable reputation for having a Teflon coating, bring back all the fears that Middle England harbours about the politics of envy, and give the opposition the weapon they are desperately seeking to attack the Government with.

By all means block the Lady Ingram loophole which allows individuals to give away their home and carry on living in it. But taxing more people's assets when they die will take the Government right back into the emotive tangle the Tories got itself into when it allowed local authorities to start taking old people's houses to pay for long term care. The Chancellor would be on safer ground abolishing MIRAS while mortgage rates are low.

My bet is that the Chancellor will stick to increasing the threshold for IHT to £230,000 and concentrate on getting the maximum mileage out of introducing a 10p income tax band. In a perfect world he would substitute a 10p rate for the existing 20p rate to avoid re-introducing a fourth income tax band. If that proves too costly he could and should tinker with the width of the tax bands to fine-tune his fiscal give-away.

The Corporate Bond PEP

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A tale of two Cats

FINANCIAL MAKEOVER

NAME: CATHERINE GERMAN AGE: 28 OCCUPATION: HND STUDENT OF SHOE DESIGN AND MANUFACTURE

After leaving school and doing several jobs in the UK and abroad, Catherine (Cat) is nearing the end of a two-year HND course in shoe design and manufacture. She has managed her finances well, with a little help from dad to keep her Renault's going, but now wants to plan ahead - particularly with regard to pensions.

The adviser: Thomas McPhail, pensions development manager at

Torquil Clark, independent financial advisers (telephone: 01902 570570).

The advice: Cat's student loan is being charged an interest rate equal to inflation, an attractive deal compared with normal high-street lenders. She does not have to start repaying it until her income exceeds £17,784 pa gross; since her starting income is likely to be £12,000-£15,000, this is not an immediate problem.

Cat will need up to £200 as a deposit on her new rented accommodation, and the Renault will need replacing soon, so she would be better off retaining as much of the original student loan as possible, and saving any surplus income from her new job. Though borrowed money is expensive, and it is generally more efficient to clear debt, by doing this she will avoid a new loan

at normal high-street rates.

If she does need additional finance to buy a replacement car, she can expect to pay up to £35 per month for every £1,000 borrowed.

Cat is currently holding her cash in an instant-access account with a high-street building society and using a Barclays current account for day-to-day expenditure. She would be better off moving her savings to a telephone account with Standard Life or Egg (the Prudential) for competitive interest rates (up to 6.5 per cent gross for deposits), and money can be moved to her current account with only two or three days' notice.

Cat's personal pension plan is held with Scottish Widows, and has received rebates from the DSS for three years. It is currently worth £1,572.78 and has received no contributions since 1992. It is currently

invested in a with-profits fund, which is not ideal; with 30 years to go to retirement, Cat would be better off in an actively managed equity fund.

This type of pension has been included in the second phase of the personal pensions mis-selling review, so as she hasn't already heard from them, she should contact the adviser who sold her the policy and ask for it to be reviewed. Cat is fortunate that her policy has no on-going charges, so should increase in value.

Many mis-selling problems have stemmed from excessive charges on policies like this; the charges can be so high that the fund value goes down every year rather than up.

A woman under the age of 46 is generally better off contracting out of Serps, for men the cut-off age is higher: 51, but consideration should be given to income, as it is generally



Catherine German wants to make sure her sensible start does not go to waste

Mykel Nicolaou

not worth contracting out for annual earnings of less than £9,000.

When she starts work, Cat should contribute to a pension plan, saving as much as 14 per cent of her income for a secure retirement. She should choose a plan that doesn't pay excessive commission to an adviser: can be adapted without penalty, and

offers a reasonable choice of investment funds - as well as insurance in case she is unable to work, and a good investment record.

As well as her existing Scottish Widows pension, Perpetual's new personal pension may be worth looking at. And for a state pension forecast, she should complete the

DSS form BR19 and send it to the administration centre in Newcastle.

Readers who would like a free financial makeover should write to Andrew Verity at 'The Independent', 1 Canada Square, London E14 5DL. They must be willing to allow their name and photo to appear

Private health on parade

Andy Couchman puts private insurance through a thorough medical

PATIENTS LYING and dying on trolleys... a crisis in nursing... billions of pounds disappearing into a seemingly gaping hole. This winter the hard-pressed NHS has hardly ever been out of the headlines. Does this strengthen the case for private health insurance?

In many countries the question would not even be asked. In the US, medical insurance is virtually a necessity. In the UK, however, the mere mention of insurance can stir up feelings of betrayal. Worse, you could be accused of being a queue jumper - the NHS provides for all, regardless of ability to pay, from cradle to grave.

The problem is that for many it simply does not work as they want it to - and the growing list of things charged for or not covered means that for many health provision is already partly privatised.

For some, private medical insurance (PMI) is more a necessity than a nice-to-have option. Anyone who runs their own business needs to be covered if illness strikes; and if being part of someone else's queue is simply not an option,

then a PMI scheme could be.

PMI means that if you suffer an acute illness you can get treatment at a time and place that suit you. You will also be treated by a consultant rather than a junior doctor and you are likely to get a room of your own rather than having to share a barrack-style ward. If you are a workaholic you can even carry on working, at least until the anaesthetic hits you.

If you have to buy your own PMI plan and you are employed, ask your employer whether you can join a company scheme. Group schemes cost a lot less than individual plans and will often cover things that are already wrong with you - what insurers call pre-existing conditions.

When buying an individual plan, remember that not all PMI policies are the same and making a mistake can be very costly, especially if the treatment you need turns out not to be covered. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has been extremely critical of the way some insurers avoid telling the whole truth to customers. In particular, the OFT wants

to see customers told about just how fast premiums are likely to rise - perhaps at double the rate of inflation or more - and it wants them to understand exactly what they are and are not covered for.

Shopping around for a plan to suit you always makes sense, and a little homework can help you to decide which plan to go for. If your partner already has cover from an employer, save money by just insuring yourself. If your local NHS is better at treating children than adults you may decide not to cover your offspring.

London hospitals are the most expensive, so you may save money by choosing a provincial hospital - but check what would happen if you needed treatment that a local hospital could not offer. Some policies make a charge based on your postcode, so bear that in mind if you want to move. As the table below shows, budget plans can be a lot cheaper, but make sure you know what you are buying. Do you want, for example, to provide full medical information now, or would you prefer to have pre-existing conditions excluded? Ask your adviser or insurer to explain fully the implications of each.

You may be able to save 5 per cent by paying yearly instead of monthly or up to 25 per cent by paying the first

£100-£1,000 (or more) of any claims. You may save money by choosing not to have outpatient cover, though such costs can quickly mount up. Consider dental and travel cover.

If you have NHS treatment, many insurers will pay you up to £100 for each night spent as an NHS patient. Or they may pay you if you have to stay with a sick child. If there is a big age difference between you and your partner, it may be cheaper to have individual policies.

Never buy on price alone. Make sure that you understand not only what the policy covers but also what it does not and compare with other policies. Ask too about the insurer's track record on price rises over a 35-year period. Some insurers, such as OHRA and Exeter, do not charge higher premiums just because you get older. Like all insurers, their premiums are still likely to go up each year, however, as medical costs go up.

Contacts: BUPA: 0800 600 505; Clinicare: 01438 740 426; Exeter Friendly Society: 01392 477 200; Legal & General: 0171-451 1132; OHRA: 01703 620 620; Permanent Health: 01923 770 000; Prime Health: 01483 553 461; WPA: 01823 623 000. Andy Couchman is publishing editor of 'HealthCare Insurance Report'.

THE COST OF LIVING

How much does it cost? A couple, both age 30, with two young children could pay each month:

Budget plans
Legal & General Essential £23.65
Prime Health Care Supersaver Network £43.06
WPA Poplar £44.15
Clinicare Connect £45.16
OHRA Optional City £46.59

Legal & General Essential
Plus £29.32
Permanent Health Cover Plus £91.30
BUPA Network LocalCare £93.64

Source: Mediquote.
Note: Not all insurers provide premium details to Mediquote. Premiums assume no excess or other discounts apply.

Standard plans
Prime Health Care Saver Network £59.63
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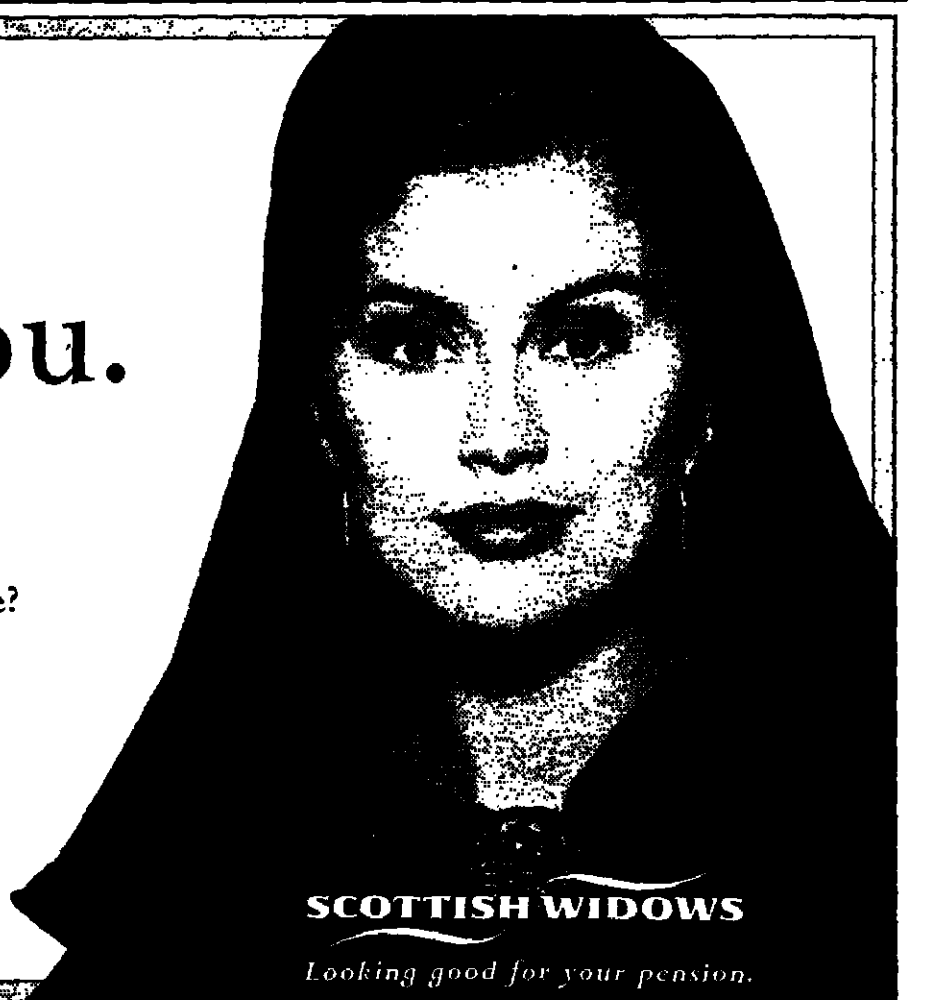
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Some of the UK's top fund managers reveal their trade secrets to Simon Read

ANALYSIS

Andrew Watkins, sales director, Fleming Income & Growth, Fleming Claverhouse, Fleming Income & Capital. "We have a strict discipline for the management of UK assets, whether in unit trusts or investment trusts. This discipline involves three key processes: quantitative, fundamental and thematic. Quantitative looks at value, price momentum, earnings-per-share revisions and growth. Fundamental covers pricing authority, management, sustainability and free cash-flow. Thematic looks at technology, demographics and long-term low inflation.

"Having screened our analysts' work, all UK stocks are then rated on a scale of 1-5 with the intention that no portfolio should hold stocks rated 4 or 5. The discipline has produced extremely good and consistent results." **Performance success:** Fleming Income & Growth - 7th out of all qualifying investment trust PEPs over three years, Fleming Claverhouse - 17th over five years, Fleming Income & Capital - 15th over one year

BORING

Chris Bowie, fund manager, Murray Corporate Bond. "Murray Corporate Bond Fund has been a good performer because it is boring. I buy only high-quality investment-grade sterling bonds - nothing fancy, no higher-yielding bonds, no preference shares, no convertibles, no derivatives. Investments are only made in companies with stability of earnings and good cash flow. Fund volatility is minimised and steady, healthy returns with no nasty surprises are produced."

THE MAGNIFICENT EIGHT



Andrew Watkins



Chris Bowie



Roger Guy



Ian Lance



Michael O'Hara



John Ross



Nigel Lanning



Jeffrey Taylor

Performance success: Murray Corporate Bond - 20th out of all qualifying unit trust PEPs in regular savings schemes over one year

CONSISTENCY

Roger Guy, investment manager, Gartmore European Selected Opportunities. "My aim is to be as consistent in performance as possible. I have achieved this. Gartmore European Selected Opportunities is a core and satellite fund. A core of 50 per cent in blue chips comes from Gartmore's Pan-European model, whereas a satellite of 50 per cent is in selected opportunities from Gartmore's Pan-European research.

"Overweights and underweights are strictly limited to 10 per cent for larger markets and 5 per cent to zero in smaller markets. This strict control ensures that unreasonable overweight positions can not be taken."

Performance success: Gartmore European Selected Opportunities - 8th out of all qualifying investment trust PEPs over five years.

GLOBAL OUTLOOK

Ian Lance, investment manager, Gartmore Global Utilities. "Gartmore is a PEP-qualifying fund. This means that 50 per cent of the fund must be in UK and EU stocks. The fund believes that global industrial sectors are becoming as important as geographical sectors as companies themselves become multinational. To benefit from this we have a team of global analysts, researching companies in a highly structured and disciplined way. I'm a member of that team and work closely with Gartmore's own global portfolio team of fund managers."

Performance success: Gartmore Global Utilities - 6th out of all qualifying unit trust PEPs over one year

LARGE BLUE CHIPS

Michael O'Hara, fund manager, Murray European. "During 1998 the key to the fund's outperformance was a focus on large cap stocks and the avoidance of cyclical sectors. I decided to avoid sectors where earnings growth is heavily dependent on increasing global growth. As such, sectors such as telecoms, life insurance and IT featured heavily in the portfolio, while there was no exposure to steels, chemicals and heavy engineering."

Performance success: Murray European - 5th out of all qualifying unit trust PEPs over one year

STOCK SELECTION

John Ross, senior portfolio strategist, Fidelity International. "Stock selection, particularly in the US market, proved very rewarding: technology companies such as Amazon, Yahoo

and America On-line showed extraordinary performance. In Japan we focused on high-quality business that can grow profits over time regardless of the external environment."

Performance success: Fidelity International - 4th out of all qualifying unit trust PEPs in regular savings schemes over one year

TOTAL RETURN

Nigel Lanning, fund manager, Dresdner RCM Merchants. "The portfolio is now valued at nearly £540million and concentrates on the largest blue chip UK companies. Attention to total return, as well as income, is a key factor in the successful formula. The management team is constantly seeking companies with attractive prospects in the FTSE 100 area or just outside it. Despite having one of the highest yields at 4.6 per cent, the trust is a sector leader over the last three years."

Performance success: Dresdner RCM Merchants - 45th out of all qualifying investment trust PEPs over five years

VISITS

Jeffrey Taylor, fund manager, Perpetual European. "We try to anticipate macro-economic trends and market themes as a guide to stocks. Visiting companies across Europe is a key part of our approach. When we are convinced of a case we are happy to take a big position, while keeping our eye on the weighting relative to our benchmark index to judge risk."

Performance success: Perpetual European - 5th out of all qualifying investment trust PEPs over one year.

Look to Europe for long-term growth

The continent is opening up, but there are plenty of investment opportunities nearer to home. By Tony Lyons

WITH JUST a few weeks to go before PEPs disappear, now is the time for investors to make up their minds. If you have not already made your PEP investment for the current financial year, you need to act now.

But the problem facing any potential investor is where to put your money. Stock markets continue to be in a very volatile state. Even though the UK has clawed back most of the fall since last summer, and the FTSE 100 even touched a new high in January, there is still nervousness about where share prices are heading.

"If we really are now in a low inflation environment, investors should

expect lower returns," says John Irons of Societe Generale. "The high returns of the past must be forgotten. If you can make 8 to 10 per cent per annum when inflation is running at under 2.5 per cent, you are doing well."

PEPs are best suited to long-term investment. "Deciding where to put your PEP money depends very much on your aims," says Roger Cornick of Perpetual, the largest PEP manager. "Are you young and therefore likely to be looking for long-term growth or if you are a more mature investor, are you looking for more tax-free income and less growth?"

"Generally, if you are a first-time

PEP investor looking for growth, you should look initially at UK funds. If you already have UK PEPs, or take a more international outlook, then you should consider European funds. Those seeking to maximise income should consider corporate bond funds."

The latter are likely to be the most widely bought PEPs in the run-up to the end of the financial year. Many investors nervous about where stock markets are heading are transferring their existing holdings in order to park their profits, while others are attracted by the headline yields, generally between 6 and 8 per cent.

The problem with corporate bonds

is that they offer less potential for capital growth. "While they will suit someone seeking to maximise income with low risk," says Toby Thompson of Newton, "many investors could do better with an income fund that gives a good total return, that is a balance of rising dividends and capital growth."

If you are looking for long-term growth, most fund managers advise European funds. "The trend in rising share prices of continental European countries is very likely to continue over the next few years," says Thompson. "Europe is still coming out of recession and the recent monetary union is likely to strengthen compe-

tion in the EU," says Loughlin Callahan, of Mercury Asset Management. European shares will also benefit from increased pension fund buying, with European pension funds now looking to invest increasingly in equities throughout the EU for the growth to provide the future pensions for an increasingly ageing population.

Meanwhile, "growth investors should not ignore the UK," says Cornick, "as there is still good value to be found. While there is talk of a recession, which we think we will just avoid, we are optimistic about the outlook onwards from the second half of 1999."

Source for performance figures: Standard & Poor's Microcap Offer to office, an increase referenced to 1st January 1999. "1st" means top quartile performance over five years in the individual Standard & Poor's Microcap sector in the case of Global Growth since launch on 1/1/96. Data will be introduced from 6th April 1999 for an annual ten year period. All Personal Equity Plans held at 5th April 1999 will be unable to accept further contributions, however they can continue to be held outside the ISA with the same tax advantages. A 10% tax credit on all dividend distributions may be reclaimed up to 5th April 2004. The value of current tax relief depends on individual circumstances. If you have any doubts about your tax position, you should seek professional advice. If you have any doubts whether this product is suitable for you and you wish to obtain personal advice, please contact an independent financial adviser. You must read the Terms and Conditions before investing. The value of investments and the income from them may go down as well as up and you may not get back the amount originally invested. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. Emerging markets are volatile and can suffer from liquidity problems. Changes in rates of exchange between currencies may also cause the value of investments to decrease or increase. Telephone calls may be recorded, issued and approved by Gartmore Investments Limited. Gartmore's authorised unit trusts are managed by Gartmore Fund Managers Limited. Both companies are regulated by the Financial Services Authority and are members of the National Association of Fund Managers. Gartmore House, 16-18 Mansfield Street, London EC2M 4LL.

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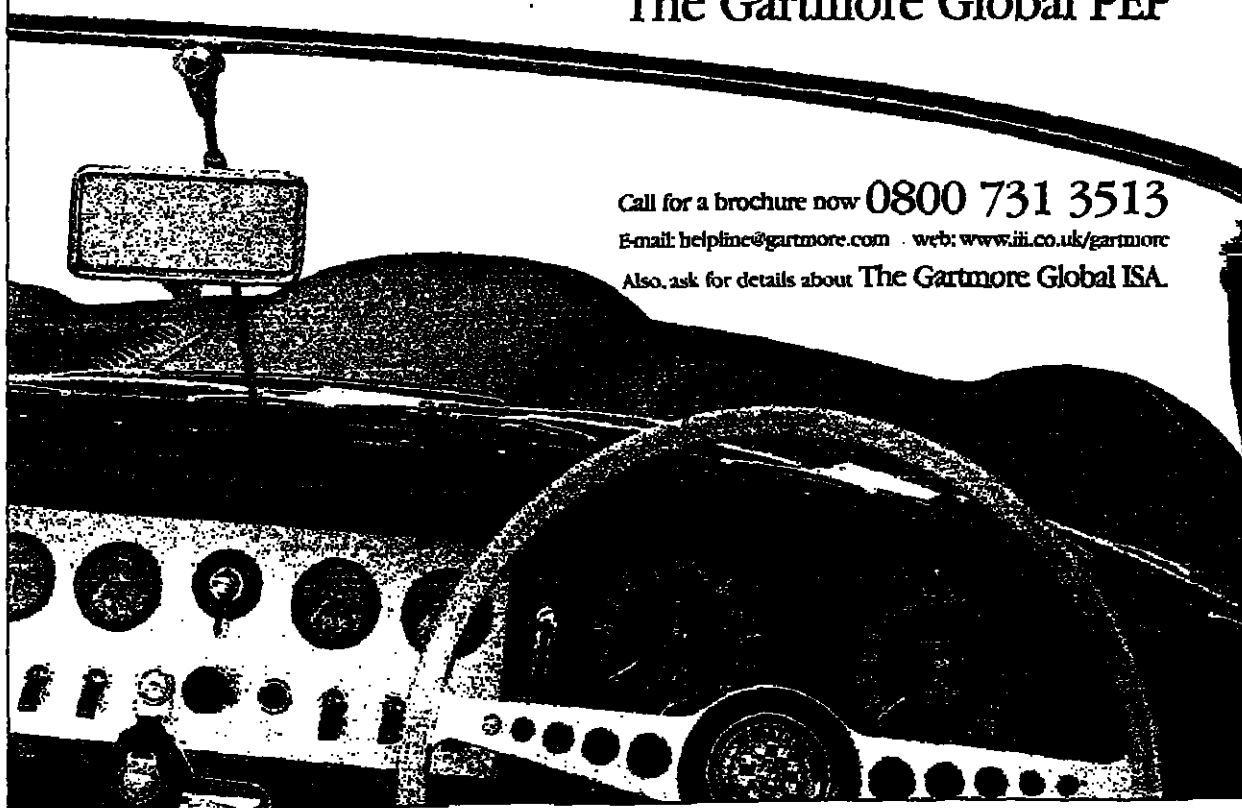
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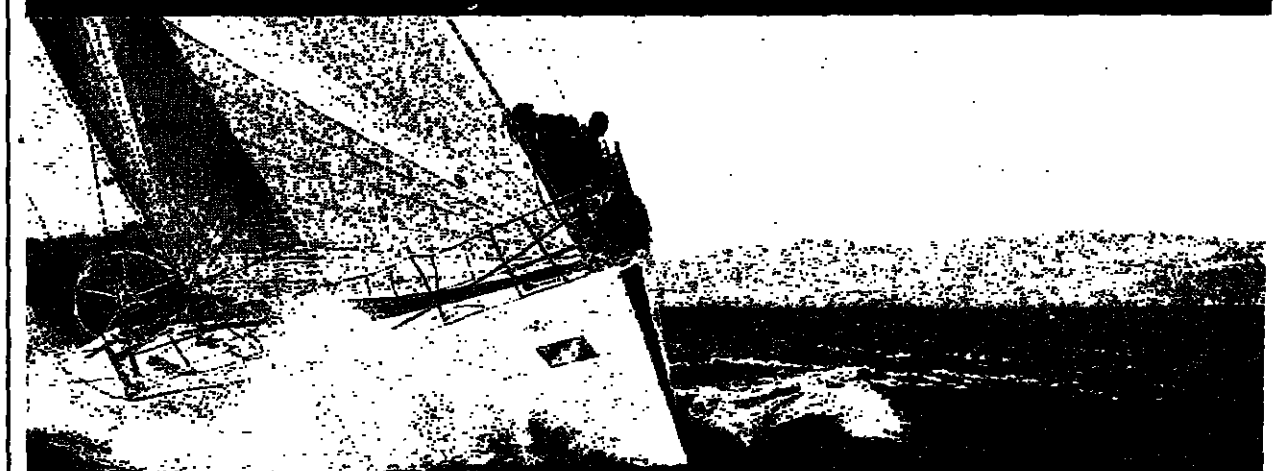
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Make all the right moves

Select the right fund and sector to be on to a winner. By Iain Morse

PERSONAL EQUITY Plans have been available for 12 years and their past performance can vary from the sublime to the ridiculous. Among the best performers, Foreign & Colonial's Enterprise Investment Trust PEP has grown £1,000 into £3,552 over five years, a compound annual return of 28.6 per cent. Compare this to a return of just £1,034.92 over the same period for the same initial investment from Murray Johnstone's Smaller Companies PEP fund (source Moneyfacts to 29.01.99).

But care is needed: Foreign & Colonial's fund invests in the high-risk and volatile venture and development capital sector. These are small company shares, and Murray's fund shows the risks inherent in the sector. "Choice of sector and fund is critical," warns Richard Hunter, of the independent financial advisers Holden



Euro PEPs: on top Brian Harris

Meehan. "But you should also look at charges and be clear about the period over which you are investing."

The five top-performing unit trust PEPs over the last five years have all been European funds, including Gartmore's European Selected Opportunities, which has turned £1,000 into £2,945.67 over the same period. Guillaume Rambourg, a fund

manager, argues: "Europe still has a long way to go. Our fund yields only about 1.5 per cent, but is showing strong capital growth."

"What we are seeing in European equity markets is a fundamental shift to giving shareholder value. Also there is a move by private investors away from cash, bonds and property towards equities. I expect the sector to continue to give good returns."

Most European funds exclude shares in British firms, but Newton has just launched a PEP that covers a pan-European unit trust. This could be the start of a trend, the euro and convergent tax regimes are creating what amounts to a single stock market for shares traded in European firms.

Newton's Sara Royle says: "Some of the main opportunities in Europe are not now one-country specific and need a fund investing across the continent."

The pros and cons

Nic Cicutti answers common questions on whether to invest in PEPs

ANY INVESTOR considering the merits of investing in a PEP will have many questions. Here are some of the most common.

Why invest in a PEP?

If you are looking for capital growth or income, or a balance of the two and you are hoping to make more than if you placed your money in a building society deposit account, it makes sense to invest in one. That said, perhaps you may not be a taxpayer, in which case, simply investing in one of the PEP's underlying investment products may suit you just as well.

What are the benefits of a PEP?

Broadly, it is the fact that income from a PEP is tax-free. And if you keep your money invested, this income rolls up in a tax-free environment.

What about capital gains?

Capital gains tax (CGT) is payable on the first £5,000 of realised gains in the current tax year. So you would need to see substantial profits from your PEP investment before benefiting from its tax-free environment.

What happens if I take out more than one general PEP in a year?

The taxman will catch you. When you take out a PEP you have to give your National

Insurance number, which allows the Inland Revenue to do a cross-check.

What are the risks of a PEP?

They vary from PEP to PEP. But essentially, they are the same risks as with all equity-linked investments. Basically, the value of your fund can fall as well as rise, and you could get back less than you have invested – although this is not the case with some "guaranteed" funds.

This could affect the income stream you may be expecting from a PEP. That said, over a longer period of time, the world's largest stockmarkets have delivered better returns than through a bank or building society account.

Can I have PEPs for my kids? PEPs are a good way to save for a child's education. You cannot open one in a child's name, though. If your children are over 18 and UK residents, they can open one for themselves. You can fund their PEP although the cheques into it must come from them, not you.

What can I use PEPs for?

The list is probably endless. You can use PEPs to help pay off a mortgage in just the same way as with old-style endowment mortgages. They will help pay for your kids' education and are very useful as pension top-ups.

How long should I keep a PEP?

Unless you are thinking in terms of at least three years, don't invest in a PEP. Most financial advisers recommend at least five years. Ten gives more of a chance to smooth out the stockmarket's ups and downs.

What about charges?

Charges vary substantially. You could find yourself paying an initial charge of up to 6 per cent, plus an annual management fee of up to 1.75 per cent. This means that if you were investing only for the short term, the initial charge on a PEP could well cancel out any growth in the first year.

How would I cash in a PEP?

Simple. You contact the company concerned, give them notice of encashment by filling in a form they will send you, or by sending in a letter, and a cheque will be on its way to you within weeks. Remember though: once you have cashed in that PEP you will lose that year's PEP entitlement forever.

What about partial encashment?

The same applies as above. Beware of penalties for partial withdrawals.

What about transferring between PEP providers?

There is no problem with

switching between one fund manager and another. You can switch without affecting this year's allowance. But to retain your PEP entitlement your new manager must do the donkey work – do not sell the PEP yourself, with the aim of setting up a new one.

How can I transfer?

The new manager will send you a transfer form to fill in. There may however be a problem. Some PEP managers administer their plans so that each year's separate PEP is amalgamated with previous years'. Can I switch between funds under one manager?

Usually that is not a problem. If the investment sector you have been in is not doing well, or the fund you are in has turned out to be a dog you can move. There may be transfer charges. Is there tax to pay if I switch from one fund to another?

By transferring your shares, you are effectively selling the old ones and buying new ones. But because this is done within a PEP there will be no tax to pay. Can I add to my PEP?

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*Source: Standard & Poor's Microcap. Performance figures based on coupon to selling prices to 01.02.99 with gross income reinvested. £8,000 invested 5 years ago is now worth £12,283, an average annualised return of 15.41%. ■ 2% discount on the buying price of units for lump sum PEP investments of £1,000 or more. Offer ends 5th April 1999. ■ You can contribute to a PEP until 5.4.99, when it will be replaced by the new Individual Savings Account (ISA). Thereafter, PEPs will enjoy the same tax benefits as ISAs, including a tax credit on dividends of 10% reclaimable for five years. ■ You should remember that past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. ■ The value of investments and the income from them may fall as well as rise and are not guaranteed. ■ Changes in rates of exchange may cause the value of your investment to rise or fall. ■ The Mercury European Growth Fund is a unit trust managed by Mercury Fund Managers Ltd (regulated by IMRO and the Personal Investment Authority), the unit trust management arm of Mercury Asset Management Ltd. ■ The Mercury PEPs are managed by Mercury Asset Management Ltd (regulated by IMRO). ■ Issued by Mercury Investment Services Ltd, 33 King William Street, London EC4R 9AS, which is regulated by the Personal Investment Authority, and represents only the Mercury Marketing Group and its packaged products which include unit trusts, PEPs and pensions. ■ For your protection, telephone calls are usually recorded.



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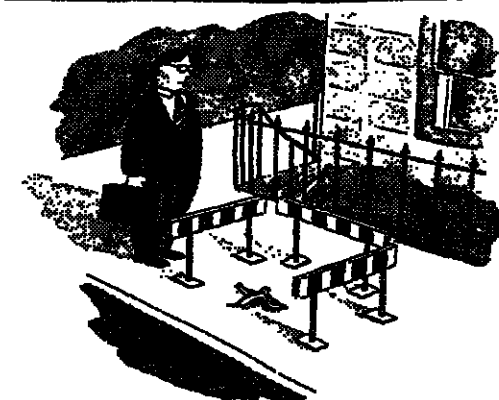
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TURN TO PAGE 15

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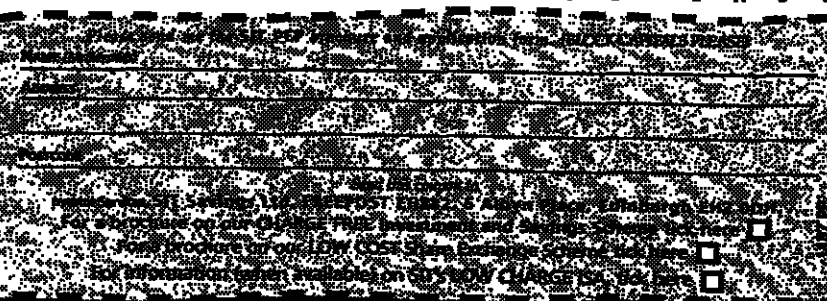
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Time to switch?

If your PEP has been a bit of a dog, maybe you should move your funds. But study the options carefully. By Tony Lyons

It may not be obvious to most PEP investors, but a second battle front in the war for our custom is opening up. This is not simply about where to place our last remaining £5,000, but about where to transfer all our other PEP investments if we feel they are not performing well enough.

Fund managers know too well that there will be no more PEP money after 5 April. In addition to limbering up for the new Individual Savings Account (ISA), which comes on stream thereafter, they aim to take advantage of the fact that this last deadline is also likely to stimulate many of us into checking how well our investments have done so far.

It may be tempting to switch out of a poorly performing PEP before the April deadline. But you shouldn't rush into any precipitate decisions. While no new money will be allowed into PEPs, transfers between managers will still be allowed. It will, in fact, be the only PEP market in town.

Why should anyone consider a transfer? There can be any number of reasons. Over time, your investment aims may change. Younger investors are more likely to be looking for tax-free maximum capital growth, while older ones tend to be more keen to seek extra income to supplement a pension. As you near retirement age, you may want to transfer your PEP funds from higher to lower-risk investments.

Maybe you have a number of PEPs with different managers, having in the past allocated your annual allowance to different groups, and now want to consolidate them under one roof. Or you could be nervous about the direction share prices are heading. If so, and you have made substantial profits from existing PEPs, you may then want to park your existing profits in a low-risk home.

But one of the best reasons for transferring is because you have invested in a fund that has consistently been underperforming. Unfortunately, there are a large number of funds that fail to beat their benchmarks, let alone do better than their numerous rivals.

"After three years is a good time to assess performance - so many groups have changed ownership and many managers have moved on to other jobs in that time," says Jason Holland of BEST Investment Brokers, who specialise in PEP and unit trust investment.

"While some managers have forecast the market correctly, quite a few have consistently got it wrong," says Mr Holland. And unless there is a convincing argument otherwise, these are the funds you should seriously consider moving.

His company regularly reviews PEP



Transfers can take you into a different money league

Reuters

funds and has found that while there are a number of top performers, there are many dogs, funds that always seem to underperform. It defines a dog as one that consistently not only fails to beat its benchmark index, but also fails it by 10 per cent or more. BEST Investment has produced a review of these dogs, available to readers who contact the company.

"Investors should periodically review their PEPs," says Graham Bates of Best Investment Services. "There is no reason to leave your money in funds that consistently underperform. So many investors buy a PEP that they then shove away in a drawer. The periodic statements and valuations they receive will tell them that the performance reflects the market, but this does not necessarily mean that the fund has been doing well. In fact, it could be doing rather badly compared with its competitors in the sector."

As many investors fail to do these reviews, Graham Bates is offering help with this, in return for giving his firm the renewal commission paid to advisers by PEP managers.

To help you decide, the table shows the average performance of fully qualifying funds in the most popular sectors. If your PEP investment shows substantially poorer returns, you may wish to consider making a transfer.

If you do want to move your existing PEP investment vehicle within the same group, to a low-risk investment or from a poor performer to a better one, all that is

often needed is a quick phone call followed by confirmation of the transfer in writing. This can often be done free of charge or at a low cost and takes very little time.

If you want to transfer part of a PEP holding to another manager you face a major problem. Most groups, apart from Fidelity, bundle your PEPs together. This means that they have no way to separate each year's PEP investment.

Of the main management groups only Fidelity allocates each year's allowance into a discrete PEP. So apart from this group, you cannot do a partial transfer. You are faced with an all or nothing decision.

If you decide to go ahead, you will need to ask the new manager for the necessary forms, fill them in, and then wait for the transfer to happen. "This can take some time, anything up to month, when you will be out of the market," warns Mr Holland. Also watch out as a large number of PEP managers will make a charge for transfers.

"Further, there is no guarantee that the new fund will give an improved performance," says Graham Bates. "And if there is a 5 per cent initial charge with the new fund, it will have to do that much better."

"If you transfer to a group that is offering a discount on its charges at the time, you should get at least as good a deal or better," says Paul Penny of Financial Discounts Direct, one of a large number of execution-only brokers who offer discounts to PEP investors. "So you may find that the initial charge can be substantially reduced."

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Get a drip on yourself

The deadline for buying PEPs may be just weeks away, but the spectre of stockmarket volatility is a powerful deterrent to buyers. However, stress-free investing can be yours – with a drip-feed PEP By Iain Morse

There is only a matter of weeks left if you fancy a last-minute PEP (closing date is 5 April, the end of the tax year). But if you have been left feeling queasy by share-price volatility, the thought of investing up to £6,000 in a lump sum could be too much to stomach.

After all, December of last year saw some of the largest ever one-day rises and falls in the value of the FTSE All Share Index.

Richard Hunter, of IFA Holden Meehan, warns: "We could still be in for a white knuckle ride. I have not advised any of my clients to make single premium payments into an equity PEP over the last 12 months. Pound cost averaging is the best response to real market uncertainty of the kind we now face."

This approach spreads investment over peaks and troughs, buying into unit or investment trusts each month.

PEP providers are allowed to offer this facility for up to 12 months of the

tax year following that in which you use your PEP allowance. Basically, you invest in the PEP now, and the manager feeds into equities a bit at a time.

Drip-feed PEPs combine a tax-free cash account with regular premium savings plan into one or more of their available funds.

If you invest just before the 5 April 3 deadline, your cash will earn interest gross while paying regular monthly premiums into one or more funds of your choice for up to 12 months. But a little care is needed; not all providers offer this facility and there can be significant variation between those that do.

For instance, NPI offers a drip-feed PEP investing your cash over three, six or 12 months. Its tax-free cash account is paying a current gross rate of 5.25 per cent interest with a minimum lump sum of £4,000 and choice of up to eight qualifying funds.

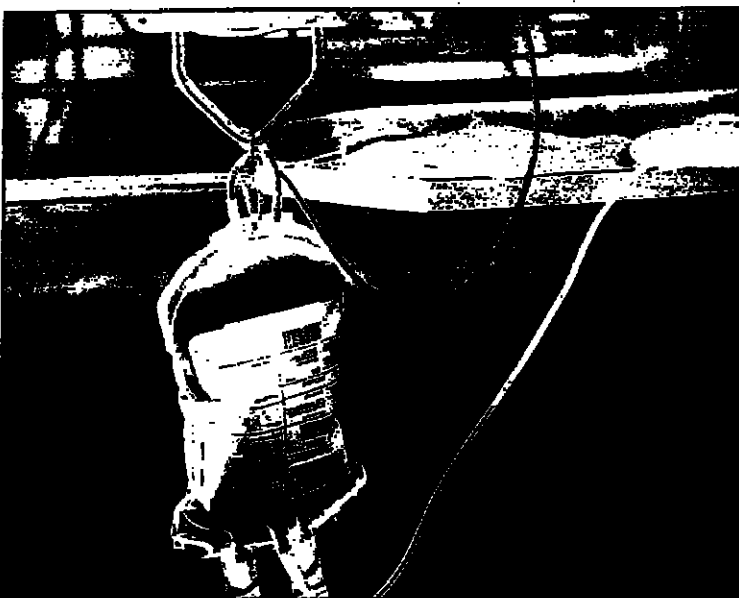
Meanwhile, Henderson Investors will let you invest over the same

periods but also offers a reinvestment option within the overall 12-month limit. This allows you to redeem any investment already made for the current year's PEP, revert your cash to a tax-free account, and then reinvest it over three or six months.

Henderson is currently paying 5 per cent gross on cash balances, will accept a minimum lump sum investment of £2,000 and offers a choice of 25 unit and investment trusts through its plan.

Fidelity has also entered the field but offers phased investment over only six months, with a minimum lump sum investment of £6,000. Interest is currently paid at 4.25 per cent, with a choice of up to 20 qualifying funds.

For further advice on drip-feed PEPs contact Richard Hunter at Holden Meehan on 0171-692-1700 or speak to your existing independent financial adviser. For details of an adviser near you, call 0117 971 1177



'Drip feeding' is a shot in the arm for the PEP market John Voos

*As at 12.2.99 the gross redemption yield and gross distribution yield for the M&G High Yield Corporate Bond Fund were 7.3% and 7.5% respectively. Estimated yields will vary and up to date figures are available on request at the number below. † Since launch in February 1993, the average annual return of the M&G Managed Income Fund is 11.2% as at 29.1.99 and 7.3% over 5 years (Offer to bid, gross income reinvested). The tax reclaim under PEPs will fall from 20% to 10% from 6.4.99 and to zero from 6.4.04. Source: M&G Statistics. Both funds are managed by M&G Securities Limited (regulated by the Personal Investment Authority and IMRO). M&G do not offer investment advice or make any recommendations about investments. We only promote the packaged products and services of the M&G marketing group. The tax regime of PEPs and ISAs may change, and the value of the tax benefits will depend on the individual circumstances of the investor. The price of units and the income from them can go down as well as up, you may not get back as much as you invested. Issued by M&G Financial Services Limited (regulated by the Personal Investment Authority). M&G House, Victoria Road, Chelmsford CM1 1FB.

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Cut the costs when you buy

It's worth shopping around to get the best deals. By Iain Morse

AS MANY as one in five of us now buys PEPs and other financial products direct.

This means answering an advertisement or making a telephone call as a first step to making an investment.

Behind this lies a revolution in consumer attitudes. "People now know at least the general characteristics of a PEP," explains Anthony Yagdaroff, of PEP broker Allen Direct, "and do not feel the need to pay high commission fees for a face-to-face meeting with an adviser."

PEPs will be superseded by the new Individual Savings Account from 5 April, and a boom in their sales is expected in the run-up to this deadline.

If buying through an independent financial adviser (IFA) or a company representative, expect commission to be deducted as an up-front charge from the value of your investment. Most PEPs

earn the advisers selling them commission of at least 3 per cent of the amount invested – up to £180 for the maximum £6,000 allowance.

Should you be tempted to buy direct and cut these costs, this can be done from several different sources – notably a product provider. Some of these offer only a limited product range through their own direct sales operations. For instance Virgin Direct offers only two PEPs – a UK Tracker growth fund and bond and gilt income fund.

Neither of these carries any initial charges, and both have low respective annual management charges of just 1 and 0.7 per cent.

Direct Line is also competing in this sector of the market, with a FTSE 100 Tracker PEP again with no initial charge and with an annual management charge of 1 per cent.

Elsewhere, Midland Bank runs Midland Direct, marketing its Household Names PEP to existing customers, again with no initial charge and an annual management charge of 1 per cent.

The drawback of these providers is that they do not offer much in the way of independent financial advice when you buy one of their PEPs. In particular, they are under no obligation

to recommend plans from other providers that might suit you better.

This means that caution is needed before you decide to buy from them. The products they offer have low charges, but also offer a very limited choice of funds. UK tracker funds are the most common in this category because they are uniquely suited to being sold without an initial charge.

Other discounted fund types – particularly those investing into corporate bonds, and gilts, involve real risk to capital and require active management.

Corporate Bond PEPs are also on offer without an initial charge, and are frequently sold direct by providers such as Fidelity. These funds hold only bonds issued by large companies, again with possible risk to both income and capital.

Providers such as Perpetual and Fidelity, which offer far wider ranges of PEP funds, have been reluctant to enter the direct market because they rely so heavily on other channels to sell their products – particularly IFAs.

One way round this is for providers to offer discounts on any initial charge both on PEPs bought direct and through IFAs; this can cut charges to 2 or 3 per cent. Either way, you pay the same for your plan.

To reduce initial charges further, you can buy from discount brokers who reinvest or rebate some or all their initial commission, living off so-called "trail commission" of 0.5 to 1 per cent of the PEP's fund value thereafter.

Shop around, and this approach can help you buy a managed PEP with no initial charge.

Most discount brokers offer general guidance on the past performance of PEPs and risk-reward ratings of underlying type of investments they hold.

Product providers include: Direct Line, 0845 3000233; Midland Direct, 0345 456123; Virgin Direct 0345 900900. Discount brokers include: Allen Direct, 0800 339999; PEP Direct, 0800 413186; PEP Shop, 0115-982 5105.

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هكذا امن النظم

Game of risk – and reward

PEPs come in many guises – but which is right for you? By Nic Cicutti



Plotting a successful course through the markets is the key to a successful PEP

IT IS possible to break PEPs down into a number of categories, of which managed, corporate or single company, equity and income, along with tracker funds, are the most common.

Corporate bond PEPs aim to provide a reasonably high income stream. If a company wants to raise capital at a fixed cost it will offer bonds paying a higher rate of interest than a savings account.

Fund managers aim to pick bonds which offer a combination of high income with minimal risk. They generally argue that corporate bonds are low-risk.

WHAT YOU SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR: Corporate bond PEPs may have both an 'income' yield, or a 'redemption' yield. The former gives an indication of the income that you might receive at current yield rates. The latter is a measure of the total possible return, taking into account both income payments and the capital repayment at maturity of the bonds held in the portfolio.

If the redemption yield is higher than the income yield, that's OK. If it is significantly lower, it means that some of the income you receive may be paid to losses.

Also, watch out for interest rate risk. If interest rates rise, bond prices will fall. This means you might get back less than you invested.

Tracker funds are almost always a type of unit trust PEP which aims to match the performance of a given stockmarket. This approach distinguishes trackers from managed PEPs.

While there are some excellent fund managers, most fail to beat the index most of the time, which is what makes trackers attractive for novice investors.

WHAT YOU SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR: Most trackers will deliver similar performance relative to others

The Independent has published a free 'Guide to PEPs', written by Nic Cicutti, the personal finance editor. The guide, sponsored by Scottish Widows, explains many of the commonest questions and offers tips on how to find the best PEP. For your copy, call 0345 678910

On the right track, yet?

Fancy tackling the stock market but don't know where to start? Index tracker funds are not such a bad place for the beginner to get a foothold. By Rachel Fixsen

INVESTING IN the stock market can seem pretty complicated, so anything that makes it easier to understand is welcome, and this is one of the key attractions of index tracker funds. High-earning fund managers are often seen in the financial press, expounding their views on the future direction of the market and the successful points of their personal investment strategy. So how is it that tracker funds, or passive funds, sometimes produce better returns for their investors by mindlessly following a formula? Is there more to trackers than meets the eye?

What is a tracker?

Firstly, it is an investment fund – this could be a unit trust or an open-ended investment company (OEIC). Equity investment funds hold shares in a large number of companies, and any one can then buy units or holdings of that fund. What distinguishes it as a tracker is that the fund manager tries to make the fund mirror the

movements of a particular stock market index – say the FTSE 100. So all trackers must be the same... No – for a start, they don't all follow the same index. Some are more successful at sticking to the index, and some are more expensive.

What's the best index for a tracker to track?

A UK index tracker might follow the FTSE All-Share index or the FTSE 100, and some track the FTSE 250. The All-Share covers most of the UK stock market index, the FTSE 100 only takes in the 100 largest companies. The pros and cons of each vary, depending on the stock-market.

How do active funds work?

Active funds are the opposite of trackers. An active fund manager uses his or her investment skills to achieve even higher returns than a particular index or accepted benchmark. This means analysing research on companies and the economy, and hoping

to pick those stocks which perform better than average.

What are the best things about a tracker?

It's easy to understand and you're not relying on the skills of one individual. Passive funds tend to achieve better performance than most active fund managers, according to many studies. Analysis by the WM Company shows that the majority of actively managed trusts underperformed the FTSE All-Share Index over the last decade.

Why choose an actively managed fund?

You may believe a particular fund manager is capable of outperforming passive funds. Some, though not many, actively managed trusts do outperform the index in the long-term. The WM Company says. But their study highlights how hard it can be to pick a good fund, showing that even if a fund is in the top 25 per cent in performance tables in a five-year period,

there is only a random chance it will repeat that in the next. "Not only do very few managers beat the index, but it's almost impossible to identify in advance those that do," says Rowan Gormley, chief executive of tracker provider Virgin Direct.

Any other reasons?

Trackers tend to perform well in certain investment sectors, but there are others where they don't. "Looking at the US, there's a powerful argument for a tracker," says Rob Fisher of HSBC Asset Management. Less than 15 per cent of actively managed US funds outperformed the index in the last quarter of 1998. But this is not necessarily the case for investment in Europe or Japan, for example.

Are trackers safer than other PEPs?

No. This is a myth. A tracker follows an index on its way up, but also has to follow it back down. When the market is falling, active funds often do

better than trackers, their advocates say. In periods of volatility, active managers can shelter investors by holding fewer equities and more bonds, cash and gilts. But an actively managed fund could become heavily exposed to one particular company which its manager believed was a rising star. If he or she were wrong, that large holding could seriously dent the entire fund.

Why is our Government approving them, then?

If it's not approving them, exactly. But trackers do win the Treasury's CAT benchmark for Individual Savings Accounts. This means that purely in terms of cost, accessibility and terms, this type of fund meets the standard laid down.

The Independent has published a 28-page guide to PEPs by Nic Cicutti, sponsored by Scottish Widows Fund Management. For a copy of the guide, call 0345 678910

The star in a galaxy of PEPs



Jupiter Income Trust continues to set the standard for PEP investment.

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*Source: S&P Micropal, total return/annual volatility, 5 years to 12.99. Jupiter Unit Trust Managers Ltd is regulated by IMRO and the Personal Investment Authority. Member of AUTIF. A subsidiary of Commerzbank AG, one of Germany's leading banks. The value of an investment in a unit trust and the income from it can go down as well as up, it may be affected by exchange rate variations, and you may not get back the amount invested. Quoted gross distribution yields of the funds are not guaranteed. Current tax levels and reliefs will depend on your individual circumstances. It was announced in the March 1998 Budget that tax credits will continue to be reclaimable in a PEP although no subscriptions can be made after 5 April 1999. From 6 April 1999 PEPs will have the same tax advantages as the new Individual Savings Account. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. Up to 100% of the annual management fee is to be taken from capital of Growth & Income Fund, Income Trust and High Income Fund. This may accordingly restrict capital growth. For your security we may record or randomly monitor all telephone calls. If you are unsure of the suitability of this investment please contact your financial adviser. Copies of the half-yearly and annual reports may be obtained from Jupiter Unit Trust Managers Ltd, 4 Grosvenor Place, London SW1X 7TJ. Scheme particulars and key features documents may also be obtained from that address. Investment does not automatically give you entitlement to compensation under the Investors' Compensation Scheme; further information is available from the Investors' Compensation Scheme or the Financial Services Authority.

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Dutch silversmith Jan van Nouhuys is devoted to reinventing a near-forgotten art. By Karen Falconer

Single sheets with soul

When Jan van Nouhuys turned his back on jewellery design as a young man to work purely in silver, he had no intention of making knives and forks or even rings, but had bigger things in mind. Seduced by the precious metal's reflective and sculptural qualities, this Dutchman hoped to breathe modernity into a dwindling skill. Thirty years on, his work graces the collections of world leaders and will show as a centrepiece of next week's Spring Olympia Fine Art and Antiques Fair, where his pieces are seen as possible antiques of the future.

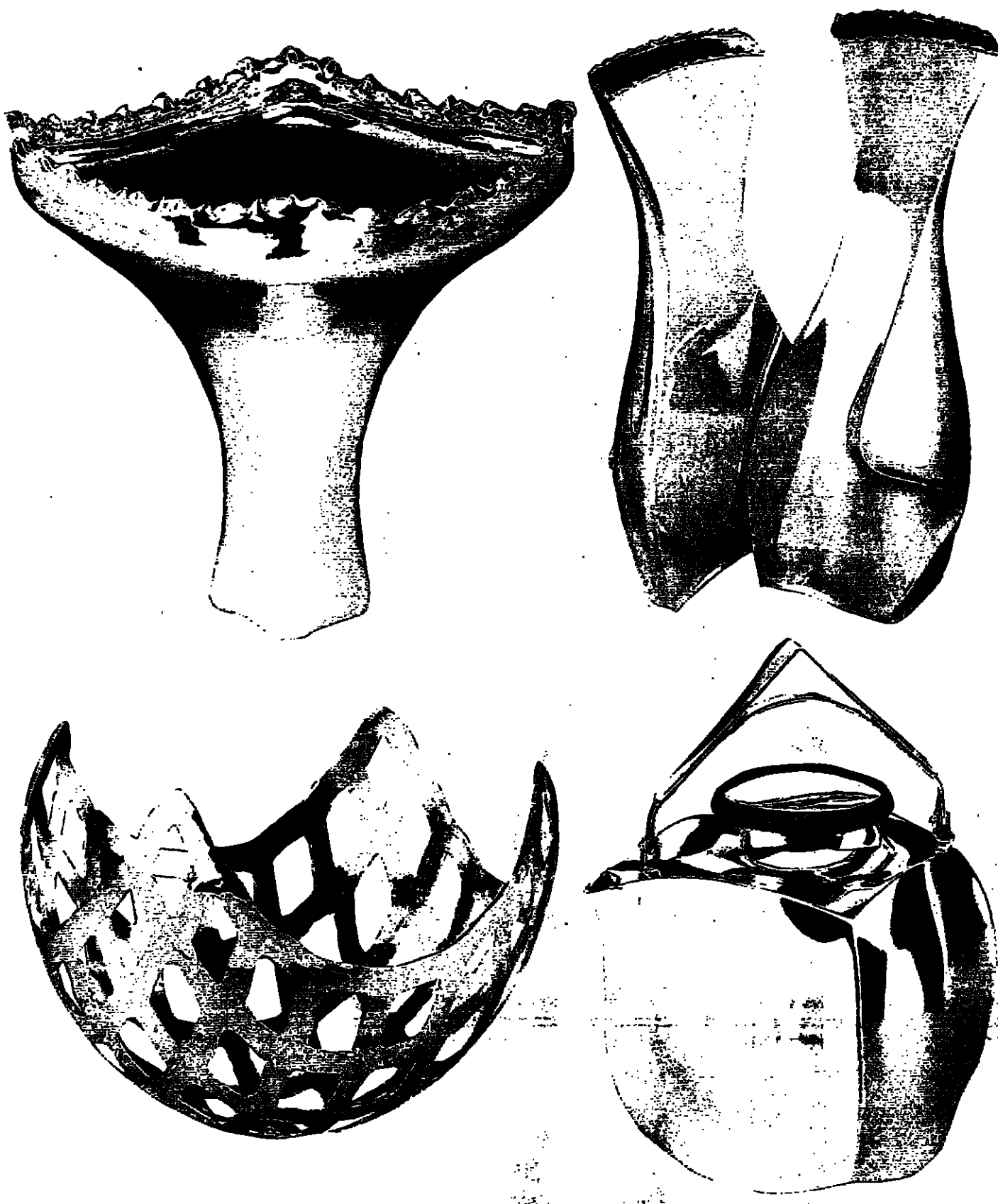
According to David Beasley, librarian at the Goldsmiths' Hall which promotes contemporary silver and jewellery, van Nouhuys's work blurs the line between the contemporary and classical. "He is acceptable by both ends as he follows traditional silversmithing ideas of function and object, but his work has a pleasing, soft quality and is less angular than some of our British cutting-edge modernists."

In a field with a history of the ornate, Jan van Nouhuys's silverware is modern and geometrically-based. Among his collection are two chatting jugs, about 20cm high, a 14cm cubic teapot, a curious pair of 30cm high twin vases and a basket. Perhaps his best-known work is the table bell-cum-candlestick that he designed for the Dutch government in 1992 as presents for world leaders at the Maastricht summit.

Silversmithing is an art for van Nouhuys. "I am an artist and silversmith," he proclaims. "I create as an artist because I do what my heart tells me. It's about fascination."

Van Nouhuys has spent his entire adult life (he is now 50 years old) pursuing what he describes as his "inner calling": helping others to set up in a skill for which no one produces the tools - you have to make them yourself or wait for an existing silversmith to retire; bringing other artists or designers together to produce pieces in silver; organising exhibitions; lecturing; studying past skills and setting up "Silver in Motion", a project that led to the formation of a centre for contemporary silver in a restored water tower in Schoonhaven, (now a national monument). Later this year, the Association of British Designer Silversmiths will join him there for a collaborative exhibition.

After such lifelong dedication it is perhaps little wonder that he refers



Clockwise from top left: Bowl, £14,000; Twinvases, £11,000; Cubic Teapot, £4,700; Round Basket, £2,100

to silver as a living muse: "Though obstinate, silver is very kind, gentle, willing, time-consuming, attention-demanding. I want each piece to have a soul. From a straight cubic shape, I want it to start living. I ask 'How can I bring life to a cubic form?'"

Like the world of nature he so often compares it to, working silver is a long and organic process which affords the silversmith time to consider the way in which the metal plays with light and reflection. Machine-made silver, van Nouhuys insists, is "completely dead" and will never have the artistic value of hand-made pieces (his are normally one-offs).

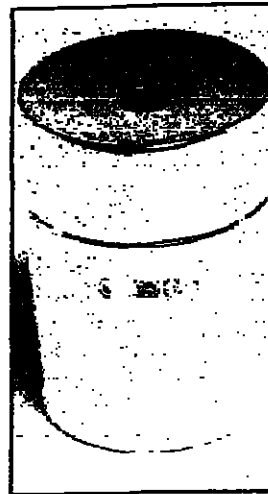
Sometimes, as with his 30cm sculptured candle stands, wine jugs and a rather ornate bowl with zig-zag edge, he works from a single piece of silver sheeting so the finished product is seamless. It's almost a point of principle. "Historians used to say it is impossible to work as the famous 17th-century silversmith Adam van Vianen did, creating out of a single silver sheet. As a silversmith, I said it must be possible. I'm not saying I'm as good as him, but I've worked out the hypothesis and I'm on the way." He also works back to front from traditional techniques to make pieces like his cut-silver basket, sawing the diamond shapes out of the sheet before raising it into the shape he wants, or "is allowed to make by the material". "In this way," he says, "the holes are all differently subtle and natural."

Although his pieces sell for thousands of pounds, he insists they are made to be used, not just collected. "Using them is the fourth dimension of each piece," he stresses. "To take it in your hand and use it... Pieces are polished by me in a way that's almost too nice. It improves when the polish is fading and it's a bit scratched from being used." But how do you evaluate what you are buying in the contemporary silver market? Stephen Burroughs, director of education at the Crafts Council comments: "The value is largely in the design - the shape, form and function - as well as the construction. At its best, silver is thought to be extremely beautiful as well as utilitarian. After that it all comes down to one's own taste."

The Spring Olympia Fine Art and Antiques Fair, Tue 23 to Sun 28 Feb at Olympia, Hammersmith Road, London W14, admission £5 (0171-244 2219). For information call 0171-370 8188; or visit their website <http://www.olympia-antiques.co.uk>. Jan van Nouhuys: tel 00 31 0182 723

SIX OF THE BEST

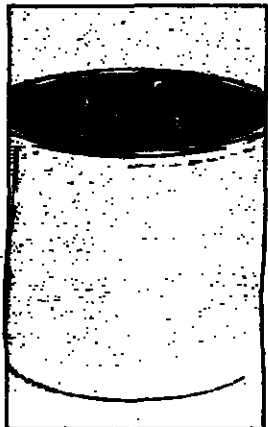
SILVER THINGS



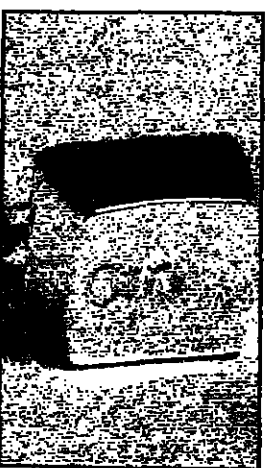
Sterling silver pencil sharpener, £75, Asprey & Garrard (0171-493 6767)



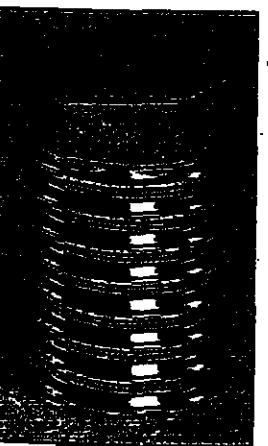
Shingle bracelet with 'shell' sections looped and plaited together to create a flexible spine. £460, Syann van Niftrik (01725 510 364)



Silver christening mug with gold interior, £110, The Nursery Emporium (01249 811 310)



Greed cufflinks from the Seven Deadly Sins collection, £80, Mercator (0181-870 3938)



Sterling silver ant and bolt pillbox, £90, Tiffany & Co (0171-409 2790)



Silver-plated brass shell nightlight holder, £10.95, Ocean (0870 848 4840)

I WANT TO OWN ... A LAPTOP COMPUTER



From left: Powerbook G3, £2,400, Apple; Jornada 820, £799, Hewlett Packard; VAIO Note PCG-505 FX, £2,099, Sony

IF YOU daydream of typing the next *Bonfire of the Vanities* while travelling to work on a carriage crammed with commuters, then this column is dedicated to you. There is, though, one thing you need to know about buying a laptop: before you take it out of the box it will be redundant. Computer manufacturers bring out newer, speedier, slimmer models faster than Zoe Ball can slam Tequilas. So be warned: everything you are about to read will be out of date before you get your car keys into the ignition, let alone make it to PC World.

POCKET MONEY
Name: The Hewlett Packard Jornada 820
Price: £799
Stockists: 0990 474 747

Description: The Jornada effectively bridges the chasm between electronic organisers and grown-up laptops. It's light (1.14kg), has a long battery life (10 hours), and comes fully equipped with software (albeit the stripped-down stuff commonly found on Personal Digital Assistants: Windows CE version 2.2, Pocket Word, Excel, Pocket Power Point and Pocket Outlook and unlike micro PCs, it has a decent-sized screen (8.2-inches wide) and keyboard. The ever-pulsating brain at the heart of this machine comprises an acceptable 190MHz processor, 16Mb ROM and RAM, and it also comes with an in-built modem (a now standard 56kbs speed). Ideal for faxing and exploring the web (it comes with Internet Explorer software). Its major drawbacks are that it isn't

particularly upgradeable and there's no CD-ROM drive.

Style: ***
Anything else worth considering? Hewlett Packard's cheaper, HP 620 V2 (£499.99, 0990 474 747) organiser; if you're only needs are memo-writing and storing phone numbers.

POCKET ROCKETS
Name: Sony VAIO Note PCG-505 FX
Price: £2,099
Stockists: 0990 424 424
Description: This slimline laptop is slightly heavier than the Jornada, more than twice the price and about five times the machine. Despite being less than an inch thick and less than foot wide, this 1.35 kg computer houses a 10.4-inch LCD colour screen, 266MHz MMX processor, 32Mb RAM and a chunky 4.3Gb

hard disk. Standard accessories include a 56kbs modem, external CD-ROM and floppy drives, a rechargeable lithium battery pack (the battery lasts around three hours) and a touchpad pen. And because it's constructed using modular principles, elements of the machine can be upgraded when necessary to delay the usual freefall into obsolescence. The main drawback is that it doesn't come with anything other than operating software: so expect to shell out more moolah before you get into second gear.

Style: ***
Anything else worth considering? Compaq's Presario 1255 (£1,499, 0845 270 4000) if your priority is a take it home and plug-in all-in-one package rather than something small and light. Bulkier than the Sony, the

Compaq has sleek Bahmobile curves and feels like it could take a knock. It's also brainier, housing a substantial 3.2Gb hard disk, and has a larger screen (12.1-inch). Its most notable design feature is a set of buttons around the touch-sensitive cursor control panel, which allow instant access to e-mail and the Internet. It also comes with an impressive array of accessories as standard including a 56kbs fax/modem CD-ROM drive, 3D accelerated graphics (a boon for playing games), enhanced audio software, and Microsoft Word and Microsoft Works word-processing software - just about everything you need to plug in, play games, write your first novel and cruise the Internet. For those addicted to Macintosh the king of kings in the

laptop world is Apple's Powerbook G3 (£2,400, 0870 241 0212) which outstrips everything on the market for pace and price. It boasts a 266MHz processor, 64Mb RAM and a 4Gb hard drive, a CD-ROM drive, a 56kbs fax/modem and a 14.1-inch screen. Everything else, though, will cost serious wedge (including the notably absent floppy drive). In fact, it's been observed that computers are so much cheaper in America (around the same price in dollars there as they are in pounds here), that you'd save more money than the cost of the tickets were you to fly to New York to buy it. Just remember that small matter of duty, before you book those tickets.

SHAUN PHILLIPS
Deputy Editor ZM Magazine

Lovers come and go but a linen cupboard is forever

More than just a piece of furniture, a linen cupboard is an almost forgotten way of life. By Michèle Roberts

My French grandmother kept her pistol in the linen cupboard, under a stack of square starched pillow-cases. The cupboard was in her bedroom, on the ground floor of the little village house inland from Etretat in the Pays de Caux in Normandy. My grandfather was often away on business, and he gave her the pistol to reassure himself that she would be safe during his absences. He was an engineer, a very practical man. He taught her how to aim and fire the gun and made her practise her shooting regularly. If a burglar dared to come through the window at night, he would find my grandmother waiting for him with the pistol cocked.

The linen cupboard was of pine, as ornately fashioned as a side chapel in a cathedral. Tall and wide, reaching from ceiling to floor, it filled up almost the whole of one wall. It had been made in the mid-19th century as part of a dowry. In those days, in the countryside in France, you started off your married life with the furniture and clothes you expected to last a lifetime and that you would hand on to your children at your death. A bed and a crockery cupboard and a linen cupboard were crucial items. The massive paneled door was opened by a large iron key inserted into the massive lock. The pediment and front of the cupboard were heavily carved with intricately twisted garlands of corn and flowers. These florid decorations embodied the local style in Normandy, the corn and blossoms symbolising the fruitfulness of the marriage of the young people who had been given these pieces of furniture.

The linen cupboard made you think of secret sexy places, of the fullness that was pregnancy. It was a sort of household god. To me as a child, it was like a little house inside the house. A special place that you needed special permission to enter. We never went into my grandparents' room unless invited. Sometimes I accompanied my aunt to help her get out the clean sheets, or to put them away. Apart from the pistol, the cupboard was full of household linen. It brimmed with everything a family might need during a lifetime, everything made in dozens, most things stitched by hand. The sheets were pure linen, thick and heavy, embroidered by my grandmother with her initials in a raised silky monogram. In those days, linen was not a luxury but simply the hard-wearing material from which most household things were made, your clothes as well as your sheets.

During the Sixties, linen went out of fashion, I suppose because it was seen as

not high-tech enough. Too peasant. Everybody was into futuristic clothes and fabrics, white plastic boots and satellites and Telstar. The vogue came in for man-made fibres like Terylene. My grandfather came back from working in the States bringing nylon-mix sheets, so the linen ones were hardly ever used any more. They were special, laid away as memories of an earlier, more leisurely time. Like so much else in my grandparents' house, they qualified as "best": to be kept in a

box and wrapped in tissue paper. Part of the charm of the linen sheets was their bulk and weight, the elaborate care that had to be taken in laundering them. They had to be hung up properly to dry in the garden, ironed with a hot steam-iron while still damp, pressing the monogram on the back so that it would stand proud, and then folded in threes before being put away. It was a lot of work. When my mother was a child, a washerwoman came in once a week to do the laundry in a big copper in the back

yard, but in post-war France, you had your own washing-machine, did your own wash, and stuck to synthetics.

I longed to inherit a pair of those linen sheets, but did not. But last Christmas, my dear neighbour in France, a farmer who still does things the traditional way, gave me a pair of the two dozen linen sheets she had sewn and embroidered for her own trousseau 35 years ago and never used on her own bed, because her husband claimed they were too scratchy. He prefers cotton

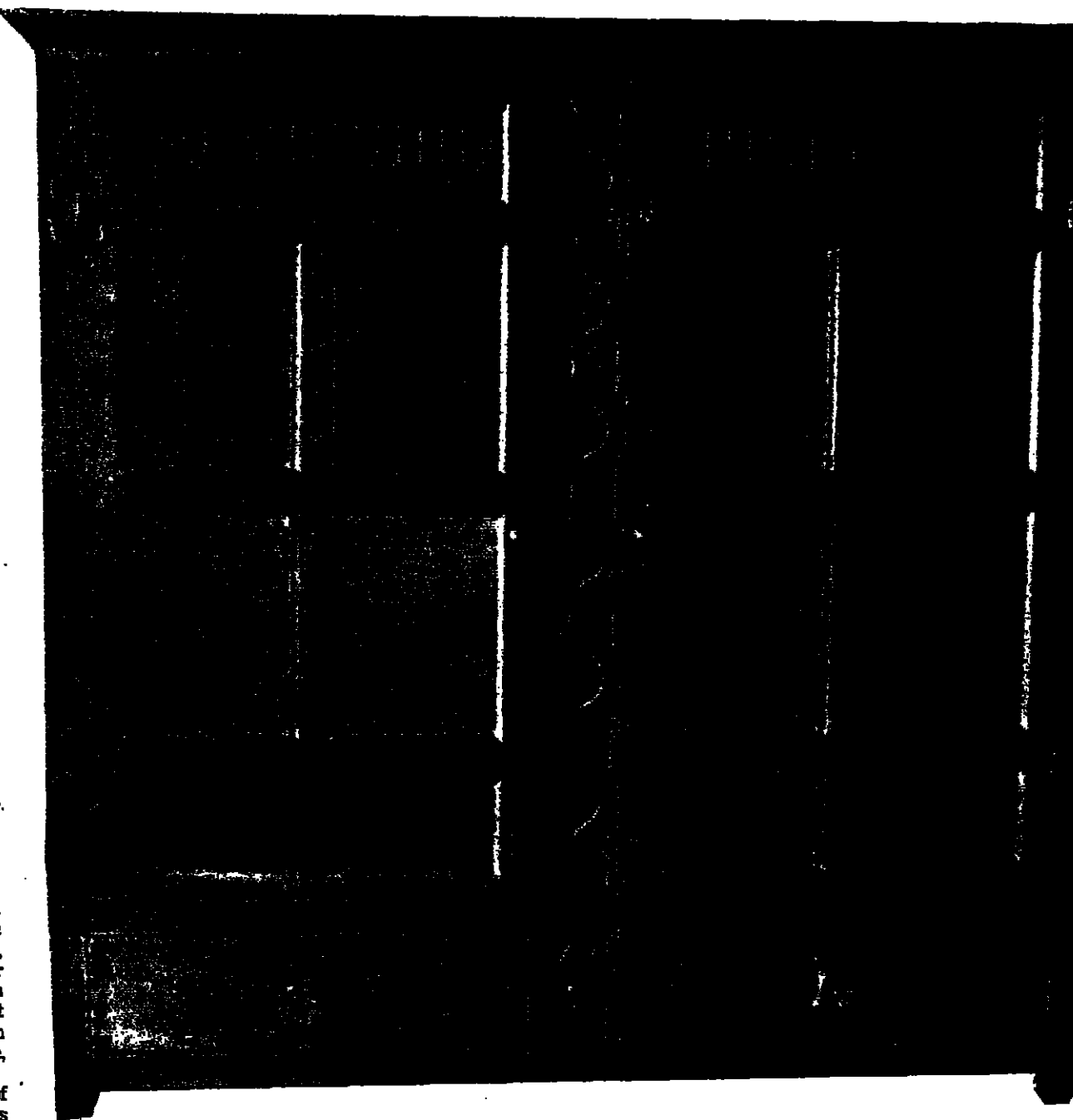
with a dash of polyester. She uses the linen sheets, some of them, to make up beds for the workmen who come and stay on the farm in summer, helping with the harvest. Lucky workmen, tucked up at night, after an exhausting day, in this superlative bedding: it's no more than they deserve. The sheets, when she brought them round, were yellow and thick, slightly rough to the touch. Now they have faded a little from being washed and dried in the sun and air, they have bleached to cream colour, and they are smooth as smooth can be to lie on. It takes two people to hang them out on the line, they are so heavy. They have draw-thread work decorating the upper edge, all done by hand, and my neighbour's initials in stump-work. They are wedding sheets, and make night-times feel like honeymoon. I was completely overwhelmed by the generosity of this gift.

When you open the door of a linen cupboard, you smell the outdoors, you smell summer. The sweetness of sun and wind which has dried the linen outside, the little bags of lavender that have been slipped between the layers to scent them and to keep moths away. It's like having a hayfield inside the house. Particularly powerful in winter. You can stick your nose into the starched piles of sheets and let yourself believe that summer will come again.

But as people vacate the farms, as unemployment bites and the younger generations move to the cities, the old ways of living get lost. Traditional linen cupboards now sell in antique shops for huge sums and belong less and less to the country people who made them. They now decorate the salons of Parisian second homes rather than being used by working families.

People can get a bit precious about linen cupboards and their contents. There is a scorching satire, in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, on a lady novelist rabbiting on about the almost mystical rapture of sleeping in fresh white linen. I always felt a bit sorry for this lady. Rupert Brooke, after all, went on about the rough male kiss of blankets, so I didn't see why she shouldn't rave about the smooth female bliss of clean sheets. French cynics define love as the contact between one epidermis and another. Well, lovers come and go, but a linen cupboard is always waiting, with the sensual, consoling caress of its sheets. That is something not to be despised.

Michèle Roberts's new novel, *Fair Exchange*, is published by Little, Brown, price £15.99



DESIGN DETAILS



PERIOD-STYLE furniture, including double and triple, glazed linen presses (from £850-£1150, natural, waxed or painted) is now available from Grand Illusions (enquiries 0181-744 1046).

Those nostalgic for their grandmother's linen cupboard, however, would do well to visit Tobias and the Angel (0181-878 8903), which stocks antique presses, and even the authentic linen with which to fill them.

For reviving this, as well as modern fabrics, Lino nel Vento and Aqua de Limone Linen Sprays (pictured) from Jo Malone (0171-720 0202) contain a different types of lavender on a thyme and tarragon base, or citrus notes on a spice base.

For those who don't have time to make their own, Culpaper (01223 894054 - mail order and branch enquiries) now manufacture pretty lavender bags which, as well as recalling the scent of French country summers, will also keep fabrics safe from moths.

Choosing linen is more complicated now than in the days when sheets were washed by hand, dried in the garden and steam-ironed. Easier-to-care-for options include the plain-dye percale range from Marks & Spencer. This fully machine-washable selection with a non-iron finish is available at £30 for a double. Call 0345 902 902 to order.

Traditionalists may prefer the Reims range, a woven jacquard design in fine cotton sateen from linen specialist The White House (0171-629 3521). Guinevere, from the Victoria and Albert Museum collection by Dorma (double quilt cover £70, pillow-cases £17, call 0161-251 4400 for stockists) or Rose Trail duvet covers (pictured, £50 for a double, pillow-cases £12 each) by Cath Kidston (0171-221 4000).

KATY GUEST

Secrets of a century of inspiration

What began as teaching aids for students is now a fascinating collection of art across a range of media. By Margot Coatts

HIDDEN BEHIND the scenes in many art and design colleges are rich collections of works by alumni, graduating students and staff, as well as oddball collections of design classics, historic teaching aids and photographic archives.

In December 1998, the London Institute - an umbrella title for five of London's art and design colleges: Camberwell, Central Saint Martins, Chelsea, the London College of Fashion, and the London College of Printing - decided to mark the century's close with an exhibition of the colleges' joint archives and ongoing contemporary collections.

A Century in the Making was prepared in just six weeks, a formidable task directed by Professor Margaret Buck (head of Central Saint Martins), curated by Sylvia Backermeyer, head of the Museum & Study Collection at Central Saint Martins, and designed by Russell Warren-Fisher.

While all the collections are today freely available to students and teachers, and are regularly drawn on for loans to exhibitions, they have never before been exhibited together. The range is extraordinary, from images of 1920s students grappling with hairdressing problems in one of the trade schools which was a forerunner of the London College of Fashion, to historical objects from the Teaching Examples Collection, such as fragments of 15th-century illuminated manuscripts or painted Victorian tiles by William de Morgan, collected to inspire by W R Lethaby, the first Principal of the Central School.

The Camberwell Collection contains an assortment of artefacts, not necessarily associated with members of the college, which once formed improving exhibitions circulated to schools by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). It is strong on avant-garde European design and British studio craft from the 1950s to the 1970s, containing stainless-steel tableware by Robert Welch, cutlery by Arne Jacobsen, ceramics by Lucie Rie, Bernard and Janet Leach and Ewen Henderson, and glass from Whitefriars, Kosta Boda and Murano. And



Left: Murano glass decorative form and (right) ceramic head, 1998, by Stuart August (Camberwell)

no British representation would be complete without a dash of whimsy, supplied here by Sam Smith's carved and painted wooden "tugs".

The Central Saint Martins Museum Collection houses not only the teaching examples, but works by its famous alumni and

teachers, including Lethaby himself and Joyce Kilmer. Clissold, who studied in the School of Book Production in 1927-29, became a successful designer of textiles which she printed by wood and lino block. A team of women in her Footprints studio in Brentford produced furnishing lengths,

garments, scarves and handkerchiefs in Clissold's charming illustrative style. These, together with dye-recipe books, swatches, blocks and ephemera, are housed in the Southampton Row building, close to Bloomsbury.

In a similar way, an archive of Tom

Eckersley's poster designs has been formed at the London College of Printing, where Eckersley was head of design from 1957 to 1976. His posters exploit typesetting, colour offset litho and screen-printing to the full.

The London Institute's Contemporary Collection covers the broadest possible range of media. It was established in 1986 and since then has steadily acquired outstanding work by students and, latterly, teachers. From Central Saint Martins students it has absorbed the latest research in textile design and printing using

The range is vast, from images of 1920s hairdressing students to painted Victorian tiles

Cad/Cam (computer-aided) systems, and a stylish jacket in flower-sprigged paper-like fabric made by Hussein Chalayan in 1993. Camberwell graduates rate highly for ceramics and metals; interesting recent items include a raised and patinated copper vessel designed by Hiroshi Suzuki in 1996, now studying at the Royal College of Art in London, and the forged-steel "Croco" stool by Nathan Abbey, now set up in a studio in Old Street in the East End.

The London Institute collections have one obvious advantage over most museum collections, in that many of the works pre-date or divert from mainstream trends; this enables us to see directions that our existing visual culture might, and might not, have followed.

A Century in the Making: museum and contemporary collections from the London Institute, London Institute Gallery, 65 Davies St, W1, to 10 March. Mon-Fri 10-8

DESIGN LINES

PHILIPPE STARCK is the epitome of the wacky Gallic designer: his spidery lemon-squeezers and luminous lamps are bold, brilliant and very covetable. Now the long-time enfant terrible has hit 50, and to wish him Happy Birthday the design shop Purves & Purves is hosting an exhibition of his work, including his latest creation, a transparent plastic chair.

THIS IS your last chance to enter the new Peugeot Design Awards. The competition is open to creators of furniture, lighting, metalware, ceramics & glass, and textiles. The prizes include £1,000 for a winner, plus £500 for two runners-up per category, and £15,000 for the overall winner. Closing date is 26 February. For an application form, send an A4 size with a 3p stamp to Peugeot Design Awards, G2, Oxo Tower Wharf, Bargehouse Street, London SE1 9PH (website www.peugeot.co.uk/design/awards)

TO TIE in with Modern Britain 1929-39, at London's Design Museum, the Twentieth Century Society has organised three days of talks and outings on the artists and designers included in it. Among the speakers and subjects are Robert Elwell on Ben Nicholson's Textiles and Benedict Read on "Herbert Read: the Pope of Modern Design". Modern Britain 1929-39 conference takes place 5-7 March, £20 a day (students £10). Bookings: Jill Sack. The Twentieth Century Society, 77 Concorde Street, London EC1M 6EJ (0171-250 3357)

MECHANICAL BEAUTY is the aim of Steel, Stars and Glass at the Science Museum, an exhibition featuring five cars which tell the Mercedes-Benz story from the 1888 Benz, the first Mercedes to arrive in Britain, to the new A-Class. Rarely seen photographs by Zoltan Glass, encapsulating the romantic history of cars, accompany the exhibition. Steel, Stars and Glass is at the Science Museum, Exhibition Road, London SW7 until 28 March (0171-938 8000)

Welcome to television country

Hit series set in beautiful scenery can do wonders for local house prices. But the opposite can also be true, as worried residents of the Lake District, setting of the BBC's top drama, are discovering. By Ben West

RESIDENTS OF Ullswater in the Lake District are up in arms over the effect the BBC's hit television drama series *The Lakes* is having on the locality. Now in its second series, Jimmy McGovern's stirring shocker has lured thousands of extra visitors to the area.

Residents are right to be concerned how this may affect the local property market. It's nice to be in the limelight, but if a previously tranquil haven is transformed into an overwhelming tourist trap, house prices could plunge by thousands.

Although the expensive chocolate-box dramas can create considerable positive interest in an area, if too much grim reality is portrayed – such as the accident-prone Bristol as seen in *Casualty* or the unglamorous Liverpool of *Brookside* – it is hardly going to produce a Kensington price tag.

"If an area becomes famous because of television you might find that it detracts from people wanting to live there – if it gets too high a profile, with too much traffic and too many tourist attractions and visitors," says Clive Hopkins, partner of agents Knight Frank.

Areas that are often filmed, such as the photogenic Royal Crescent in Bath, can have television production staff installed so regularly, creating disturbances and plying parking places, that it can put people off wanting to live there all together.

With more than 160 episodes broadcast since the pilot in 1973, the BBC's *Last of the Summer Wine* is Britain's longest-running sitcom. Set in a beautifully-filmed Yorkshire Pennines steeped in nostalgia, the programme has brought a huge number of visitors to the area over the years.

The programme is filmed around Holmfirth, near Huddersfield, and local estate agents have no doubt that the programme has had a size-

able effect on the property market. "Although people wouldn't buy here just because they've seen the programme, it certainly encourages them to come here in the first place," says Beverley Fisher, manager and valuer of Halifax Property Services in Holmfirth.

"The way the programme shows the area is picturesque and, in making the place popular, it makes it more saleable. It's certainly more expensive in the Holm Valley area – prices are always in excess of those in similar villages nearby."

Halifax at Holmfirth (01484 686511) currently has a two-bed cottage for sale at New Mill, a semi-rural location close to what is described as "Summer Wine" country. It costs £84,950. At the town's Cliff Road, a stone-built Victorian three-bedroom property with good views of the Pennines is for sale at £72,000.

The North Cornish port of Padstow has recently been experiencing

second homes, and so the sales were obviously assisted by the programmes," says Michael Ivens, branch manager of Black Horse Agencies in Padstow.

"People know that they are easily able to obtain income from holiday home rentals as the season has now extended from six to 10 months a year since the programmes were first broadcast."

Stein has featured Padstow in his programmes and has a restaurant, café and hotel in the area, which can only add to the attraction of the port for star-struck television viewers.

"Last year prices went up by about 3 per cent, but the year before that they went up by 20 per cent, and still the market is buoyant," says Ivens. "In the town itself, £100,000 would get you a three-bed terraced cottage with no parking and little or no garden. Three years ago, it would have been £85,000, and a lot of the increase is due to Stein."

Padstow's branch of Black Horse Agencies (01841 532230) currently has a five-bedroom terraced house in the town's conservation area and a three-bedroom detached bungalow at Trevone, two miles from Padstow, both for £129,950.

'Goatland used to be quiet, but now it's overrun. Television has had an adverse affect, putting off buyers'

a property boom believed to be caused almost solely by a star chef's television series. Since Padstow resident Rick Stein has appeared on the BBC to present *A Taste of the Sea*, *Fruits of the Sea* and the current *Seafood Odyssey*, prices have risen sharply in the area. Locals have even labelled the port "Padstein" because of television's effect on the area.

"Last year, 91 per cent of everything was sold to people outside the county and 67 per cent was for



Too popular for their own good: the cast of the BBC's hit drama 'The Lakes'

enough cottages available, which can be attributed to *Heartbeat*. We sold one in Newtondale two years ago for £95,000 and it went last autumn for £132,000. In Rosedale there are hardly any cottages now, while three years ago there was the pick of 12."

Winters of Pickering (01751 472766) is selling Railway Cottage, a three-bedroom Victorian workman's cottage in the hamlet of Newbridge, near Pickering, for £64,950.

The sitting room features a stone fireplace and exposed beams. At Lockton, a modern stone-built end-terraced three-bedroom cottage is going for £75,000.

One of the small screen's most famous images is the opening titles for *Coronation Street*. Yet long-running television exposure for the area – Laburnham Street in the Langworthy district of Salford – has done nothing to improve property

prices. Many of the terraced houses are boarded up, and General Accident confirms that properties here go for as little as £5,000.

Most external filming for the hit ITV show takes place at Crich and, to a lesser extent, Fritchley, on the edge of the Peak District in Derbyshire. "I haven't seen any evidence of its effect on property values, but exposure of the village in the TV series has meant that more people

are visiting, and identifying the Peak area as an attractive part of the country," says local surveyor for Black Horse Agencies, Paul Sumnerfield. "It's inevitable where you have a national TV series focusing on North Derbyshire."

Current properties with the Belper office (01773 826981) include a four-bedroom detached cottage in Fritchley with countryside views for £175,000.

Dome, sweet Dome...

The Millennium Dome is at the heart of a London success story. By Ginetta Vedrickas

THIS MILLENNIUM may mean a bigger knees-up than normal for many, but for buyers and sellers in Greenwich it has another significance. Are house prices escalating within staggering distance of the Dome?

"Too early to tell," says Doug Norris, manager of John Payne Residential's Greenwich office, who believes that improved transport in the form of the Docklands Light Railway and the Jubilee Line extension may be just as significant. But whatever the reason, "it will be a big year for us".

Mr Norris has seen price rises of between 30 and 50 per cent in the last two years but, in line with the rest of the country, predicts steady, not startling future increases.

On the river front, one of the largest developments is Millennium Quay, where developers Fairview are building 580 properties ranging from one-bed-roomed apartments to town houses. Will this flood the market and dampen prices?

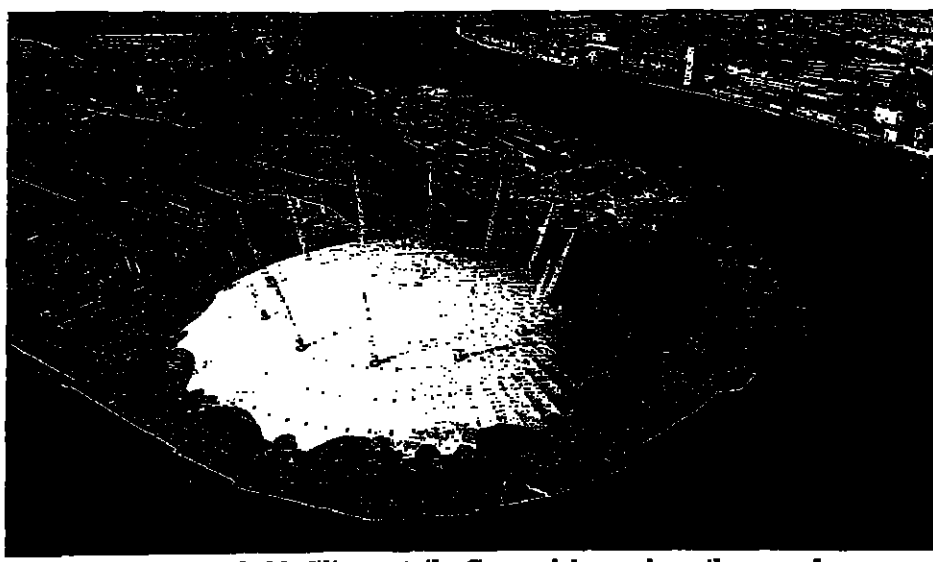
"We need more housing in Greenwich," says Mr Norris.

In January, two-bedroom flats in Millennium Quay fetched £70,000, apparently with queues around the block. Five hundred applicants are on the waiting list for the next phase which goes on sale later this month when similar-sized properties are expected to sell for around £90,000.

Amanda Ridley and Yi Guo currently own a flat in Camden, north London, but are considering a Greenwich defection.

"It's a good time to buy before the Tube goes in," says Amanda. "It feels exciting to be part of something new, and it's a great area for families."

She believes that £90,000 is cheap for a riverside flat. "We



Whether the Dome's behind it or not, the Greenwich area is on the up and up

will stay for a while and then sell. It will take us up the ladder a couple of notches."

For buyers who prefer a slice of history, Mr Norris has four three-storey houses carved from a church hall on Devonshire Drive for £260,000. A new agency, Trading Places, which specialises in "the weird and wonderful", believes this area is often overlooked; it is marketing a penthouse apartment in a Victorian school conversion for £360,000.

Buyers chasing an SE10 address at a knockdown price could do worse than visit an auction. Last week Hyde Housing Association sold several properties through Allsop that included two four-storey houses on Old Woolwich Road that went for £110,000 and £176,000. Both needed refurbishment, but Mr Norris estimates that, in top condition, four-bedroom houses there should command £200,000. This month he will

market a refurbished cottage in Caradoc Street for around £150,000, and two properties in the same road sold for £105,500 and £107,500 at auction.

Agents find that Greenwich now attracts a younger, professional clientele, but, for buyers with expectations larger than their pockets, Mr Norris advises exploring the fringes. Charlton is certainly grateful to its increasingly popular neighbour; "It's put us on the map," says Marjorie Baptiste, of Hindwoods and White Dent's Charlton office.

Hindwoods currently has no large period properties on offer, as Ms Baptiste explains: "They get snapped up immediately."

Just 20 minutes by train to London Bridge, the area has a large rentals market: "We get a lot of pre-married, pre-mortgage professionals working in the City, but the property must look good. These days people don't expect shabby."

A good-quality one-bedroom property fetches a monthly rental average of £500.

SE7 offers value and, while lacking the cachet of an SE10 address, benefits from Dome views at a fraction of the cost. More intimate views will soon include residents in Victorian dress (complete with corsets) when Wall To Wall Television films the second phase of its series, *1900 House*, commissioned by Channel Four. Executive producer Leanne Klein calls the programme a "living experiment".

"The idea is to show how our everyday lives have changed since 1900 thanks to scientific improvements and technological advancements," she says.

Ms Klein turned house-hunter as she searched the borough for a house where a family could live as Victorians (plus television cameras and crew) for three months: "I spent days trailing the streets

armed with Ordnance Survey maps searching for the right-sized property which would have housed a lower-middle-class family."

Ms Klein found much of Greenwich too expensive for her budget up to £200,000, and many buildings were pre-Victorian, unsuitable for the programme's rigid requirements: "Millions of houses were built at the end of the last century, and statistics show that around 40 per cent of us now live in houses dating back to that period."

She eventually bought a house in Ellismore Road, in the Blackheath area, for £130,000, but her priorities were different from most buyers: "We wanted it as horrible as possible to film its restoration. We were looking for a Seventies nightmare and we found it."

Ms Klein made many discoveries behind the furnace: "We found the original Victorian wallpaper underneath, and the neighbours have let us look around their houses as all the houses in the street were built by the same builder."

Finding the house was harder than finding a family willing to live without the comforts of central heating, electricity and hot water for three months. Some 450 families applied, and now that restoration is almost complete, the successful family is about to move in. *1900 House* will be screened this autumn.

John Payne Residential: 0181-858 9911; Fairview: 0181-366 1271; Hamptons International: 0171-493 8222; Trading Spaces: 0171-277 4994; Hindwoods & White Dent: 0181-858 3378; Allsop & Co Residential Auction: 0171-494 3686

STEPPING STONES

ONE COUPLE'S PROPERTY STORY

SHEILA HAYDEN and her husband began married life in 1944 in a two-roomed flat in Edgbaston, Birmingham. When Sheila became pregnant their landlord disapproved, so they bought a house with a 45-year lease in nearby Moseley for £500.



The house had an interesting past: "It was an air-raid warden's post during the war and was in a pretty poor state. A land mine exploding nearby had demolished a large conservatory and the ruins still littered the garden."

The Haydens set to "putting the place in order" and eventually bought the freehold for £600. In 1952 they sold for £1,500 and moved to Brewood, an attractive Staffordshire village, where they bought a small three-bedroom bungalow for £3,000.

They lived happily with their two small children until one day they found a water mill a mile out of the village up a farm track. Not only was the property derelict, it was officially condemned as unfit for human habitation. What made the Haydens want to swap their comfortable home for a condemned property? "It had a two-acre pool and paddock and a stream running through its acre of garden. It was such a beautiful sight."

With great difficulty the Haydens persuaded the local, stateily-home-owning landlord to grant a 60-year lease, for which they paid a few hundred pounds. They then found themselves in a Catch 22 situation. The council would not remove the order until the building was renovated and the

Haydens would not renovate until they were sure that the order would be lifted.

"Eventually my husband met the local surveyor behind the pub and the deal was struck." In 1959 the family sold their bungalow for the purchase price of £3,000 and, after two years of hard work, moved into what was by now a beautiful house.

In the 1960s the Haydens "took advantage of the Labour government's Leasehold Reform Act". They gave up the paddock for which they had no use but bought the freehold on the house, garden and pool for £2,500 in what proved to be an idyllic family home for almost 35 years.

By 1983, Sheila's husband's infirmity made maintenance increasingly difficult. They sold for £90,000 and moved into the village where they paid £60,000 for a modern house. How did it compare to the mill? "At first I felt like I was in prison and was in absolute misery but we pulled it to pieces and made it our own."

After 12 years, Sheila's hip replacements and her

husband's further infirmity prompted another move. They sold for £145,000 and moved to live with family in Sutton Coldfield. Her husband lives nearby in a nursing home and Sheila enjoys security and independence. She recalls their property purchases with fondness, but has no advice for today's buyers: "So much was accidental, but it wasn't a bad investment."

Those moves in brief
1950 Bought air-raid warden's house for £500 (and freehold for £600), sold for £1,500.
1952 Bought bungalow for £3,000, sold for the same sum in 1959.
1960 Paid £2,500 for the water mill's freehold, sold for £90,000.
1983 Bought modern house for £60,000, sold for £145,000 in 1995.

GINETTA VEDRICKAS

If you would like your moves to be featured write to: Nic Cicuiti, Stepping Stones, One Canada Square, London E14 4SD. A prize of £100 will be awarded for the best story published before 31 March

Definitely worth a punt

Hi-tech industries and more traditional attractions are heightening demand *John Lawrence*

For large expensive properties, buyers and sellers alike are locked into a vicious circle. Bidwells quickly achieved the

For large expensive properties, buyers and sellers alike are locked into a vicious circle. Bidwells quickly achieved the

Council tax: Band A is £455, and Band H is £1,385.

Estate agents: Bidwells: 01223 841842; Carter Jonas: 01223 368777; Pocock & Shaw: 01223 322552.

hem its half-acre garden

ing sitting room with an
in bookshelves and cupboard
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o bathrooms and a dressing
t, the garden includes a pond
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